

JACK RANGER'S TREASURE BOX

CLARENCE YOUNG



Class PZ 7

Book .Y85

Jan



"YOU—YOU SAVED MY LIFE," SHE REPLIED.

JACK RANGER'S TREASURE BOX

Or

The Outing of the Schoolboy Yachtsmen

BY

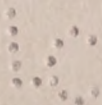
CLARENCE YOUNG

AUTHOR OF "JACK RANGER'S SCHOOLDAYS," "JACK RANGER'S
WESTERN TRIP" "JACK RANGER'S GUN CLUB," "THE
MOTOR BOYS," "THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE
CLOUDS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

c19115



PZ7
.Y85
Jan

BOOKS BY CLARENCE YOUNG

THE JACK RANGER SERIES

12mo. Illustrated.

JACK RANGER'S SCHOOLDAYS
JACK RANGER'S WESTERN TRIP
JACK RANGER'S SCHOOL VICTORIES
JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE
JACK RANGER'S GUN CLUB
JACK RANGER'S TREASURE BOX

(Other volumes in preparation)

THE MOTOR BOYS SERIES

(Trade Mark, Reg. U. S. Pat. Of.)

12mo. Illustrated.

THE MOTOR BOYS
THE MOTOR BOYS OVERLAND
THE MOTOR BOYS IN MEXICO
THE MOTOR BOYS ACROSS THE PLAINS
THE MOTOR BOYS AFLOAT
THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE ATLANTIC
THE MOTOR BOYS IN STRANGE WATERS
THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE PACIFIC
THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE CLOUDS
THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE ROCKIES
THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN

(Other volumes in preparation)

Cupples & Leon Co., Publishers, New York

Copyright, 1911, by
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

JACK RANGER'S TREASURE BOX

388738
29

Printed in U. S. A.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ALMOST A FIGHT	I
II. THE SKELETON AT THE FEAST	11
III. A CHANCE FOR A LONG CRUISE	25
IV. THE TREASURE BOX	38
V. WHAT IS IN IT?	48
VI. CALEB HERKIMER IS STARTLED	58
VII. FUN WITH FATHEAD FARSON	65
VIII. THE TREASURE BOX IS GONE	78
IX. THE DETECTIVES ARRIVE	83
X. A NEW CLEW	90
XI. A CHANGE OF PLANS	99
XII. ALL ABOARD!	109
XIII. JACK'S DILEMMA	123
XIV. SAVED FROM THE SEA	131
XV. JACK IS PUZZLED	145
XVI. THE DERELICT DESTROYER	155
XVII. AN ACCIDENT	162
XVIII. LIMPING TO PORT	167
XIX. THE STRANGE VESSEL	174
XX. THE HATPIN	186
XXI. BUDGE IS TANGLED UP	193
XXII. IN THE LIGHTNING FLASH	198

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII. AT PORTO RICO	206
XXIV. HEMP SMITH	214
XXV. TWO ODD LETTERS	224
XXVI. OFF FOR CAVERN ISLAND	235
XXVII. HELPLESS AT SEA	242
XXVIII. BUDGE FALLS OVERBOARD	248
XXIX. A STARTLING DISCOVERY	255
XXX. THE EMPTY BOX	263
XXXI. THE FLIGHT	271
XXXII. THE PURSUIT	277
XXXIII. THE SECRET OF THE BOX—CONCLUSION	284

JACK RANGER'S TREASURE BOX

CHAPTER I

ALMOST A FIGHT

"HERE you go, Jack, have a catch!" and Sam Chalmers tossed the ball with great swiftness to a tall, good looking chap, one of a number of students strolling over the campus of Washington Hall. Jack Ranger made a leap into the air, to capture the horsehide, and sent it back again, with unerring accuracy.

"Fine!" cried Chalmers, who, as the foremost authority on baseball in the school, might be considered as knowing what a good catch was. "Fine, Jack! Come on, and we'll have a game."

"Hold on, Jack," begged Dick, otherwise known as "Bony" Balmore, because of his extreme thinness. "Come over to my room. I've got a great scheme on tap. It'll be a rich joke!"

"Go on!" yelled Nat Anderson, Jack's most particular chum, "you promised to come with me, Jack, and have a quiet little feed in our room. Tantalizing tarantulas! But I've got to think up

something to do when we get back to Denton, to make the folks there realize that we're still in the land of the living. I need your brain, Jack, to help me plan something appropriate to celebrate our homecoming, and the closing of this ancient and honorable institution of learning," and Nat, with a leap and a bound, locked his arms around his chum.

This had rather a disastrous effect, as, at that moment Sam Chalmers once more threw the ball to Jack, and the latter's arms being pinned to his side by Nat, Jack could not make the catch. The ball whizzed past him, and struck a rather fat and slouchy lad, who was nearby, going plump against his chest with a dull thud.

"Here! who threw that ball?" demanded the lad who had been struck so unexpectedly.

"I did," answered Sam promptly. "It was an accident, though, Snaith."

"I don't believe you!" spluttered the fleshy individual, who, from the fact that he boasted that he was going to be a physician, had been dubbed "Doc." "It was Ranger."

"Well, I didn't throw it, but I missed catching it, which amounts to the same thing," responded Jack, throwing off the restraining hold of Nat Anderson, for Snaith, a bullying sort of chap, looked as if he intended to make trouble.

"You did it on purpose, too, so it would hit

me," went on Doc. Snaith. "I've got a good notion to——"

"Well, what are you going to do?" demanded Jack coolly. "I tell you it was an accident. Anderson was holding my arms. I repeat that I did not intend to let the ball hit you, and I need hardly point out that if you persist in insisting that I did it on purpose it is the equivalent of calling me by a short and ugly name, in which case——"

"Meandering mud turtles!" murmured Nat, who was given to odd expressions. "That's quite an oration for Jack."

The crowd of students who had just been released from class and lecture rooms, thronged closer around Jack and his more intimate chums. At this sign of hostilities, Snaith, with an angry look on his face, strode toward Jack.

"Don't give me none of that razzle-dazzle talk," blurted out the bully. "I say you let that ball hit me on purpose, Ranger, and I'm going to get square!"

"At your service, Count," retorted Jack, with a mocking bow. "When and where you please, as they say in the novels."

There was a laugh at this, for Jack, happy-go-lucky, light-hearted chap that he was, could carry off almost any situation to advantage. Snaith flushed. He was cooling down somewhat, for, more than once, he had come into a clash with

Jack, and more than once had he felt the weight of our hero's fists in a good, square fight.

"Well, I'm waiting," said Jack calmly, as Snaith hesitated.

"Hold on a minute," entreated Sam Chalmers, pushing his way into the ring of lads about the two principals. "I'm in on this. If Doc Snaith wants to be accommodated, I can help him out."

"Who said anything to you?" demanded the bully.

"Well, I threw the ball, and it wasn't Jack's fault that he missed it," said Sam.

"No, it was mine," added Nat. "Heaving hipopotamuses! We all seem to be getting in on this. It was partly my fault. I guess you'll have to tackle all of us, Doc.—one after the other."

"Hu! Think you're smart, don't you?" sneered the bully. "But I'll get square with all of you yet. It's a good thing the term is almost over, or I'd make you wish you'd never come to Washington Hall, Jack Ranger!"

"That'll do for you!" cried Jack sharply. "I've stood enough of your bullying! If you want anything out of me, Snaith, you know how to get it. We've met before, and I'm not at all averse to another little go with you, but I won't have you making cracks like that. I've told you it was an accident, and if you insist that it wasn't I'll thrash you here and now, and take the consequences!"

With blazing eyes and clenched fists, Jack took a step nearer his antagonist. Sam and Nat moved to his side, not to protect their chum, for Jack was fully capable of holding up his own end of any argument with the bully, but they wanted to assume their share of the blame. However, Snaith did not seem to want to carry the matter further.

"All right," he muttered. "I'm not going to fight now, and maybe lose my standing in class. But I'll get square with you, Jack Ranger, and you, too, Chalmers and Anderson," and with that he turned and made his way out of the circle of lads.

"Gee! I was in hopes we'd see a nice little scrimmage before we said good-bye to this old shack," remarked Fred Kaler, as he took out his mouth organ and began playing a march to keep time to Snaith's retreating footsteps. The bully caught the strains of the music, and changed his gait, but Fred promptly changed the tune, and once more Snaith was marching to the melody of the harmonica.

"You quit that!" he yelled, shaking his fist at Fred.

"I guess it's a free country," retorted the musical student. "I'll play what I please," and when Doc. tried to walk slowly, in order to defeat Fred's plan, the owner of the mouth organ changed to a

funeral march that exactly fitted the lazy gait. There was a roar of laughter, and the discomfited fat lad hurried into the school dormitory.

"Well, that's over," remarked Sam. "Come on now, Jack, and we'll get up a ball game. The last of this season for Washington Hall, perhaps," and the words were accompanied by a sigh, for Sam would rather play ball than eat.

"Don't you go with him, Jack, or you'll get in more trouble," urged Bony Balmore, cracking his eight finger knuckles one after another, like a battery of popguns. "Come with me, and we'll put up a game on Professors Gerlach and Socrat. It'll be our last chance to have some fun with them."

"No, Jack and I have to organize a home campaign," insisted Nat Anderson, who lived in Denton, Jack's home town. "We want to celebrate our arrival there in a fitting manner."

"Better cut 'em all, and come with me," advised Fred Kaler. "I've got a fresh lot of boiled hard-shell crabs in, and we can get the meat out with toothpicks, and drink ginger ale. I smuggled some in to-day, right under the nose of the monitor. I'll blow you to a good feed, Jack, and I've learned two new tunes on the jewsharp."

"That settles it, I don't go with *you!*" cried Jack, with a laugh. "No jewsharp music for mine in the last week of the term."

"Come on play ball, then!" urged Sam.

"No, let's plan a trick on the rival professors," pleaded Bony, cracking more knuckle joints in his excitement.

"I'm your old home chum, come with me," urged Nat. "Pickled pollywogs! But don't you want to do something when you get back to Denton?"

"Say, for cats' sake, let me alone!" begged Jack. "I can't be in seven places at once. Besides I ought to be boning away on my geometry, if I'm going to make good in the last exam. I can't go with you fellows."

They renewed their pleading, but Jack was obdurate until Bony Balmore, with a sudden inspiration, whispered something in Jack's ear.

"Is he going to give it to-night?" asked our hero eagerly.

"To-night," replied Bony, "and it will be a good chance to get square with him. He's a regular coward, for all he says he's going to be a doctor. Will you do it?"

"Sure. Come on, and we'll get it ready."

"I thought you said you had to bone on geometry, Jack," spoke Nat reproachfully, as his chum moved off, arm in arm with Bony Balmore.

"So I do, fellows, but the geometry will keep, and this won't. Listen, but keep mum. Bony has just proposed a great joke. I'll let you all in on it soon, but first we have to get it ready. Now run

off and play, like nice little boys," and Jack assumed a fatherly air. "We'll call you when it's ready," and ignoring the entreaties for him to take part in a ball game, or assist in some schoolboy pranks, Jack walked quickly over the campus with the thin student who had made a certain proposition to him.

As there will be a few minutes of comparative quietness now, though not more than that where Jack Ranger is concerned, this will be as good an opportunity as any, of telling you something more about him and his friends.

Those of you who have read the first book of this series, entitled "Jack Ranger's Schooldays," need no special introduction to him. In that book was related how, after playing a number of pranks in Denton, where Jack lived with his three maiden aunts, the Misses Angelina, Josephine and Mary Stebbins, he was sent off to a boarding school. This was Washington Hall, sometimes called Lakeside Academy, from the fact that it was located on the shore of Rudmore Lake. There Jack was accompanied by his chum, Nat Anderson, whose activities in his home town also induced his parents to ship him off to school. In the first volume was told of a mystery concerning Jack's father, and how Mr. Ranger was obliged to remain in hiding in the far west, because of friend-

ship for a certain man, who was being sued over a land deal.

In the second volume of the series, called "Jack Ranger's Western Trip," there was related how, learning from Judge Bennett, of Denton, something of the mystery concerning Mr. Ranger, Jack set off to find his father in the far west. He had many adventures and passed through no little danger before he ended his quest. And part of his trouble was caused by a man whose real name was Hemp Smith, but who called himself Marinello Booghoobally, and who sometimes posed as an East Indian mystic.

The third book, called "Jack Ranger's School Victories," dealt with life at Washington Hall, in which Jack took an active part, and the fourth volume, "Jack Ranger's Ocean Cruise," gave in detail an account of his enforced trip on the *Polly Ann*, commanded by Captain Reeger, who, though not a bad man at heart, was in the power of a scoundrel named Jonas Lavine. Lavine sought to harm Jack and his chums, to get even with them for spying on him in his efforts to defraud the United States government.

In the next volume, the fifth, entitled, "Jack Ranger's Gun Club," there was related the story of an interesting hunting trip Jack and his chums took out west to the "Bad Lands" district of Wyoming, and how they solved a certain mystery. The

boys had returned from the west in time to resume their studies at Washington Hall, and now the winter had passed, spring had come, and the long summer vacation was at hand. The closing days of school were, as usual, marked with jollity and sport, and in this our hero took a prominent part.

"Now for some fun," announced Bony, as he led Jack toward the medical laboratory. "The coast is clear, and I have everything we need in my room. This will be the joke of the year! I guess Snaith will wish he never gave a farewell banquet."

"It certainly will be great," agreed Jack. "But we must let Nat and the other fellows in on it."

"Sure. Just as soon as we get it ready. I didn't want them all to pile in at once, for fear it would leak out. It's risky enough as it is. Now you and I will get the bundle of bones, and the rest will be easy. Then we'll arrange for a private exhibition."

"Good," exclaimed Jack, and forthwith the two proceeded to carry out the joke.

CHAPTER II

THE SKELETON AT THE FEAST

MOVING quietly along the now deserted school corridors, for it was the hour when students and teachers were either preparing for supper, or strolling about, Jack and Bony made their way cautiously to the medical laboratory of the school. There, for the past weeks, class after class had assembled to peruse the intricacies of physics, chemistry or physiology. To aid them in the latter science were charts, plaster casts of the human anatomy, and a complete skeleton, strung together in a realistic manner, and mounted on an iron rod on a pedestal, so that it stood upright. It was this skeleton that Jack and Bony were after.

"Cheerful looking chap, isn't he?" asked Jack, as they gained admittance to the laboratory, and, with keys surreptitiously "borrowed" from Socker, the janitor, had opened the closet containing the skeleton. "He has a perpetual grin on. Reminds me of you considerably, Bony. You might be twins."

"Cheese it, Jack! Such jokes are in bad taste," and Bony Balmore, who had little more flesh on

him than had the anatomical specimen in the closet, shuddered slightly.

"Have you got the phosphorous, Bony?"

"Sure—a lot of it in my room. Lively now, and then we'll arrange the rest, and notify the others of our clan."

The two students lifted out the skeleton. In spite of the fact that it was only bones, the supports and wires that held it together, and the pedestal on which it stood, made no light burden.

"You take the feet, and I'll support the head," directed Jack, and Bony did as requested. They passed through a dark hallway on their way to the thin lad's room, and, as they reached a particularly gloomy corner there came a sudden noise—it was the lower jaw bone of the skeleton rattling against the upper teeth.

"What—what was that?" cried Bony, nearly dropping his end of the specimen, and he looked around apprehensively.

"Go on, you goat!" cried Jack, endeavoring to stifle a laugh. "I was merely testing our bony friend's talking powers. He has a good jaw action. We'll need that for to-night."

"I—I thought——" stammered Bony.

"You're getting superstitious," interrupted Jack. "Hold on, what's that?"

"Some one's coming!" whispered Bony. "Sounds like Martin, the monitor."

There was no doubt about it. Footsteps were heard echoing along the corridor.

"Caught!" groaned Jack. "Where can we hide the infernal thing? Let's pitch it out of the window!"

"No, it'll smash all to pieces. Here, can't we stuff it behind this curtain?"

"Too late," murmured Jack, as a figure came into view just ahead of them.

"Professor Socrat!" almost hissed Bony, as he beheld the French teacher. "He'll spot us, sure!"

"Leave it to me," whispered Jack. "I think I can get away with it," and, to Bony's surprise, instead of sneaking along, or trying to hide the skeleton, Jack advanced boldly, still carrying his end. Bony followed.

"Ah, good evening, Professor Socrat," greeted our hero, as he came up to the French instructor. "I am happy to meet you," and Jack bowed as low as was possible, while supporting one end of a skeleton.

"Ah! It iss ze student Jack Ranger, also Monsieur Balmore," responded M. Socrat, and not to be outdone in politeness, he, too, bowed.

"We are hard at work, you observe," went on Jack quickly, not giving the instructor time to ask any questions, for Bony could see by the astonished gaze of the professor, that he was anxious to know where the lads were going with the skele-

ton. "We are losing no time before examinations close," went on Jack. "Physiology is a most fascinating study, Professor Socrat, and it is easier to comprehend it when one has the bony structure plainly before one. Is it not so?"

"Yes—yes, of course, yes, my dear Ranger—but——"

Jack hastened to interrupt him.

"It is curious how the jaw action is controlled," went on our hero, and turning half around he caused the teeth of the skeleton to click together. "We wish particularly to look into that. Then the arm movement, the radius and the ulna——" Jack waved a bony hand in the professor's face.

"Sacre!" exclaimed the Frenchman, jumping back, for he had little liking for such grisly jokes. "Is eet possible, Ranger, zat you contemplate studying——"

"It's never too late to study," interrupted Jack. "We must get right to work. Kindly allow us to pass, Professor Socrat, as we must do considerable work yet to-night, and the examinations are to-morrow."

"Pardon!" murmured the polite Frenchman, thrown completely off his guard by Jack's ingenuous manner. "I am of the utmost delight to see you so studious. I would zat my students in ze grand French tongue were such!"

"I saw Professor Gerlach down the hall, talk-

ing to one of your French students," spoke Bony, which was true enough, though the affair happened some hours back. "Perhaps he was trying to induce him to give up French and study German next year."

"No! Is zat so? You don't tell me! I shall at once remonstrate wiz zat uncouth German professor!" cried M. Socrat, for between him and the representative of the Fatherland there was undying racial hatred, on which the students played to their own advantage. "I t'ank you of ze utmost sincerity," added the French teacher, and, thinking no more about the strange sight of two students carrying a skeleton, Monsieur Socrat hurried off, intent on rescuing his pupil from the clutches of his national enemy.

"Whew!" exclaimed Jack, setting down his end of the figure, and moping his brow with his handkerchief. "That was a narrow squeak!"

"Yes, but you managed to carry it off all right," responded Bony. "Come on, now, before any one else spots us. It won't be so easy to explain next time, though you have wonderful nerve, Jack."

They took up their odd burden, and, a little later, were safe in Bony's room. There they got out a number of packages, some long strings, screw eyes, and a bottle of some substance that was kept under water.

"Be careful of that phosphorous," cautioned Bony.

"Of course," agreed Jack. "Well, I guess we've got everything ready, and we can go to grub now. Are you sure Snaith's spread is to come off to-night?"

"Sure, I know some of the fellows he invited. They're not in our crowd, so we can settle off a lot of old scores this way."

"But how can you get in his room?"

"Easy. You know his quarters open into an old closet that used to be a sort of storage room for books."

"Yes."

"Well, there is a door opening from that closet into Snaith's room, and another door from the same closet into a room that is piled full of old desks, chairs and rubbish. The two doors are always kept locked, but I got the janitor to tell me one of his war stories to-day, and he was so delighted at the chance of working off some of his alleged experiences, that he told me all I wanted to know. I also sneaked some keys off his ring, as I did the one to the closet where this bony gentleman was confined. The rest is easy."

"What's the game in detail?"

"This. We'll paint the skeleton with phosphorous, so it will show in the dark. Then we'll rig it up, as you suggested with strings run through

screw eyes, so we can dangle the legs and arms and rattle the jaw bone. Then I've arranged a sort of trolley wire in the old storeroom, through the book closet. At the proper time I'll switch off the lights in the banquet room, open the two closet doors, and the skeleton will be revealed. We'll be in hiding with the rest of the fellows, and we'll pull the strings, the bones will do a song and dance, and the skeleton will slide down the suspended wire right toward the bunch of fellows in Snaith's room."

"A sort of skeleton at the feast, eh?"

"Exactly. Now come on. We'll get grub and let the rest of our crowd in on the joke."

Jack and his chums (the latter having been told part of the joke) were too excited to make their usual good meal that night at supper, but they managed to conceal their impatience from Martin, and soon left the dining hall. Doc. Snaith and several of his chums also left early, and, seeing them depart, Jack winked at Nat.

"They're saving their appetites for Doc's spread. I hear he's going to have wine and cigarettes," said Jack.

"You're not going to squeal on him, are you?" asked Fred Kaler.

"No, of course not, for it would mean dismissal for the lot of them if they were caught. But I

fancy our arrangement will effectually break up the feast. Keep mum, everybody."

A little later, one by one, a number of choice spirits made their way quietly to Bony's room. It was necessary for them to go singly, so that Martin would suspect nothing. Still, there was not so much risk as there would have been earlier in the term, for discipline was more or less relaxed near the closing day.

"Well, are we all here?" asked Bony.

"Guess so," answered Jack. "Count noses, and see."

"I'll do it," volunteered Sam Chalmers, whereat he proceeded to tap each student lightly on the most prominent part of his face.

"Here! Let up! Duplicating dubloons!" cried Nat Anderson. "Do you want to give me the nose bleed?"

"That was only a love tap," exclaimed Sam.

"Well, this is a love-shove!" retorted Nat, and he gave Sam a push that sent him over Bony's bed.

"Soak 'em both, fellows!" cried Bob Movel, and, grabbing up the pillows he proceeded to do what Jack described as the "Othello" act—stiffling the indignant cries of Nat and Sam beneath the mass of feathers. Fred Kaler made a leap for the bed.

"Here, cut that out, or you'll have the whole faculty in here," ordered Bony, sharply.

But the lads would not heed. Piled up on the bed Sam, Jack, Bob and Fred were in a seemingly inextricable mass. Arms and legs were flying about, and there was smothered laughter.

"Oh, for cats' sake, cheese it!" begged Bony, in despair.

Fred Kaler rolled out of the conglomeration, upon the floor, with a thump. He sat up a trifle dazed, but immediately pulled out his mouth organ, and began playing softly: "Just Before the Battle, Mother."

"Oh, cut it out! Cut it out! Chop it off!" pleaded Bony.

"Yes," added Jack, getting up, and pulling Nat with him. "If we're going to do anything to Doc. Snaith, it's time we were at it."

Calm was restored once more, and then, seeing that they had all that they needed with them, the students crept softly out into the corridor, and, carrying the skeleton in their midst, while one went ahead to act as a scout, they made their way to the old refuse room, which, through a big closet, connected with the apartment of Doc. Snaith.

"Easy now, fellows," cautioned Bony. "Some of 'em are in there, and they are on the lookout for trouble."

This was true enough, for Snaith was violating the rules, by giving a spread in his room without permission, and it was necessary for him and his cronies to keep quiet over it, lest they be found out. This quietness on their part might lead to the discovery that something was going on behind the closet door, for it was impossible to carry out the scheme without making some noise.

But Jack and his friends worked so quietly that no hint of their presence leaked out. The skeleton was arranged on the long wire, and with well-oiled keys Bony unlocked the doors, so that, at the given signal, the weird figure of bones would slide forward, right up to the banquet table.

"How about it?" asked Jack in a whisper. "Are you all ready Bony?"

"Yes, all I have to do is to shut off the lights, and put the phosphorous on the bones."

"Well, daub it on now. I guess it will last until we get ready."

The fiery stuff was not to be applied until the last minute, as it had a tendency to evaporate or vaporize, and the conspirators wanted to get the full effect of its glowing properties.

The bones were coated with it, and most unearthly did they shimmer in the darkened room.

"Gee, but that's great!" murmured Nat Anderson. "Horrificed hoptoads! It's immense!"

"Just keep some of those expressions for a safer

time," urged Jack, in a whisper. "I guess they're all in with Doc. now, Bony."

Bony, listening at the keyhole, confirmed this. From the room of the bully came confused sounds and whispers, and the subdued rattle of bottles and glasses. Then the unmistakable odor of cigarette smoke could be detected.

"I should think he'd be afraid Martin would smell that," said Bob Movel.

"He's probably got all the windows open," said Bony. "Well, we'll let 'em get going good and strong, and then we'll make 'em see things."

A quarter of an hour passed. The fun in the room of Snaith became more pronounced.

"The spread is getting in its work," explained Jack grimly. "I guess it's about time, Bony. We don't want to get caught ourselves. Better start."

"All right. I'll sneak around and turn off the lights. There's a special switch connecting with Snaith's room, otherwise Martin would have cut the glims off long ago. I'll douse 'em, however, and then you give me a chance to get back here before you spring the skeleton. You can open the doors and have all in readiness."

Bony went out softly to gain the corridor in front of Snaith's room, to turn off the electrics, while Jack and his chums waited in the darkness, the gloom of which was dispelled by the phosphorescent skeleton.

The noise in the room where the feast was going on became louder. Some one started to sing.

"Here, cut that out!" ordered Snaith hoarsely. "Do you want to queer this racket?"

"It's all right," was the somewhat thick response. "Open another bottle. I'm a sport, I am."

"A hot sport," commented Jack to his companions.

"Gimme a cigarette," came another request.

"We won't go home until——" began a lad, lifting his voice in song.

"*Will* you be quiet?" begged Snaith. "I'll put you all out if——"

There came a general gasp of dismay from the unseen feasters. Then there were stealthy movements on the other side of the closet door.

"Bony has doused the glims," whispered Nat. "Open the door, Jack."

On the well-oiled hinges, the closet door swung back. To the frightened gazes of Snaith, and his guests, there was revealed, in the black void beyond them, the glowing skeleton.

There were several groans of dismay, and a scraping back of chairs over the floor.

"Oh—oh!" faltered some one. "Oh——"

"Shut up, you chumps! It's only some of that Ranger crowd's foolery!" snapped Snaith, angrily.

"Lemme go! I want t' get out a' here," mumbled a frightened voice. "I—I ain't never goin' t' drink any more! Oh, where's the door?"

At this moment Bony came hurrying back.

"Run it ahead," he whispered, and Jack yanked the string that pulled forward the skeleton on the trolley wire.

"Make her dance," suggested Nat, and he and his chums hauled on the cords that set in motion the bony arms and legs of the glowing figure.

Forward slid the skeleton, straight toward the bully and his cronies, who got up from the banquet board in such haste that they upset it. There was a crash of bottles and glasses.

Jack pulled the string that opened and closed the skeleton's jaws. They snapped viciously. The effect was ghastly.

"Oh! Oh!" came in stifled moans from the feasters.

"Where's that confounded door?" demanded one.

"I—I guess it's the cigarettes," faltered another.

"Turn on the lights!" begged a third.

"Shut up!" ordered Snaith in a frenzy of fear.

"You'll have the whole school down on us."

Nearer and nearer came the skeleton. It was right at the threshold of Snaith's room now, as far as it could go through the closet on the wire.

The legs danced a jig. The arms flew about. The fiery jaws snapped together.

"Never! never again!" wailed a tearful voice. There was another crash of bottles and glasses.

"Come on," ordered some one. "I've found the door."

"Can't you make a light, Snaith?" asked several.

"No! Get out if you want to! I'm going to settle with Ranger," was the bully's reply.

He lunged forward, as if to grab the skeleton. In the glow of the phosphorous Jack saw him, and pulled the figure back. The closet door was shut, and locked, on Jack's side, just as Snaith threw himself against it with a crash.

A moment later there was a rush in the corridor from his room, and, through the keyhole Bony could see the lights flash up. In their gleam stood Martin, Dr. Mead, and several of the faculty members.

"Snaith is caught good and proper," whispered Bony, as he straightened up. "Now it's up to us to get back to our rooms, and replace the bony gentleman where he belongs. The skeleton at the feast did his duty most nobly."

CHAPTER III

A CHANCE FOR A LONG CRUISE

THERE was so much excitement in the corridor where Snaith and his cronies had been caught by the head of Washington Hall and his assistants, that the little noise made by Jack and his chums in removing the skeleton, and the wires, from the refuse-room passed unnoticed. Pausing in their work of clearing away the evidences of their prank our friends could hear Dr. Mead questioning Snaith.

"What does this mean, sir? How dare you disobey the rules of this institution? How dare you? I believe some one has been smoking!" and Dr. Mead sniffed the air suspiciously. "Do you not smell smoke, Professor Gales?" he asked, turning to an assistant

"I certainly do, Dr. Mead."

"And you, Professor Hall?" appealing to another teacher, whom Dr. Mead had summoned, when Martin informed him that something unusual was going on in Snaith's room.

"I not only smell smoke, Dr. Mead, but I fear

I also smell intoxicants," answered Mr. Hall, who was a very strict temperance advocate.

"Disgraceful!" exclaimed Dr. Mead. "This shall be looked into in the morning. To your rooms at once, young gentlemen. As for you, Mr. Snaith, you may come with me. This is a serious matter."

Snaith said nothing, for there was nothing he could say, and he knew it was best to keep silent. Nor did he dare speak of the joke played by Jack and his chums, for it would only reveal more clearly his own breach of the rules.

Meanwhile, as Snaith's recent guests filed to their rooms, Jack and his chums disposed of all evidences of the skeleton prank, and replaced in the laboratory closet the skeleton itself. Then, one by one, they congregated in Jack's room, which he shared with Nat Anderson.

"Talk about sport!" murmured Bob Movel. "It was like Belshazzar's feast! Wow, how they did scatter!"

"Let's have a dance to celebrate our victory!" suggested Fred Kaler, producing a jewsharp. "I can play a two-step."

"Not to-night," interrupted Jack, seriously. "We'd better lay low. We had our share of fun. No use running any risks."

"We're under risk enough as it stands," declared Bony. "Professor Socrat saw Jack and me

carrying the skeleton, and Snaith is sure to squeal. Then there'll be an inquiry, and——"

"Leave it to me," interrupted Jack. "I'll fix it so Professor Socrat will forget that he ever met us."

"How?" inquired Nat. "Belzebub's battle-ax, Jack! but you've set yourself a hard task. Socrat has a memory as long as the common law."

"That's all right. You watch me," went on Jack, with a mysterious air.

Of course there was an inquiry the next morning, but, to the surprise of Jack and his chums, Snaith said nothing about the skeleton. The look he gave our hero, however, did not augur well for what would happen afterward. But Jack only laughed.

"I'll get even with you," muttered Snaith, as he passed Jack and Bony in the hall. They did not reply.

"Say, what about Socrat?" asked Bony of his chum. "That thing is sure to come out, and if skeleton is mentioned the Frenchman will remember that he saw us with it."

"Oh, don't worry," advised Jack. "I've got my plans all made. They'll be ripe to-day."

As Bony feared, some of the crowd in Snaith's room did speak of the glowing skeleton, at the investigation, but the references were so vague that little harm would have resulted, had it not

been that the entire faculty, including the French and German instructors, sat in judgment on the culprits. Professor Socrat was all attention when the bony, blazing figure was mentioned. He arose to say something, but at that moment, Jack, who, with nearly all the other students, had been summoned to the inquiry, passed Socker, the janitor, a note.

"Give that to Professor Socrat," he said, and Socker, who had received more than one liberal tip from Jack, was only too glad to obey. The janitor, tiptoeing his way amid the members of the faculty, handed the French instructor the note. Professor Socrat at once forgot about the skeleton, and read the missive. Then he got up quickly, and quietly left the room.

A moment later Jack sent a second note to Professor Gerlach, the big German teacher, and, he, too, left the hall where the inquiry was going on.

"There," whispered Jack to Bony, "I've switched him off, and no one else knows anything about the skeleton."

"But is that all there is to it? Won't Socrat come back, and mention it to Dr. Mead?"

"Nope," answered Jack, chuckling. "You'll soon learn why. But listen to what's going on."

The inquiry was simple enough, and, luckily, no other students save those of the bully's particular crowd were involved. Martin told how he had

heard noises in Snaith's room, and how he looked through the keyhole, and witnessed unseemly mirth. Then, while he was gone to summon Dr. Mead, and the members of the faculty, the crowd had burst out, as if in fright, and there was great confusion.

"Yes, there is no need to go further into the disgraceful scene," said Dr. Mead. "I saw sufficient for my purpose. As for this reference to a skeleton—it was probably due to the unmentionable habit of taking intoxicants, and smoking those vile cigarettes. The stench is in the entire school. It must be fumigated. Mr. Socker, you will attend to that."

"Yes, Dr. Mead," answered the janitor. "I remember once, when I was at the battle of——"

"That will do, Socker," interrupted the head of the school. "Kindly attend to the fumigation," and Socker, somewhat disappointed at not being able to tell a war story, left the room.

"Yes, it's all right about the skeleton, if Socrat doesn't think to mention it," said Bony, gloomily, for he was beginning to be a bit alarmed.

"Don't worry," advised Jack. "It will be all right."

"If it was not the end of the term," Dr. Mead was saying to the culprits, "I would suspend you all. As it is, I shall ask that Snaith's parents withdraw him from the school. I am convinced that he

was the ring-leader in this. We have had no such disgrace at Washington Hall since Jeremiah Chowden was dismissed."

The doctor referred to a student, a bitter enemy of Jack Ranger's, who was dismissed some time previous, for a serious breach of the rules.

Snaith glared at Jack and his chum, but he said nothing. Whatever he was, the bully was not a "squealer." Perhaps he thought he could "get even" in some other manner.

The inquiry was over, and the students and faculty filed from the hall. Bony and his friends were anxious to know what Jack had written in the notes that sent Professors Gerlach and Socrat out in such haste.

"You'll soon see," was our hero's answer. "I guess they have received the packages now. Come on, and see how they take 'em."

He led the way to the office of the school where all mail was distributed. As he had hoped, Jack saw the two professors, who were such implacable enemies, standing in front of a desk, presided over by Martin, the monitor. Each professor was reading again the notes Jack had sent. As they were in typewriting they bore no evidence as to who had sent them.

"Ha, dot iss ferry kind on der parts of some ones," Professor Gerlach was muttering, in his deep, German voice, as he perused the note again.

"I am to receive a history of Germany wrote by vun of der foremost authorities. Ach! Dot iss fine—goot! I shall read it mit pleasure, but I would likes to know who sends it to me. It is secret, der note says, in recognition of my ability in standing up for my country. Ach! Der dear Vaterland! Who would not stand up for him?"

At that moment Professor Gerlach caught sight of his enemy, the Frenchman. Professor Socrat was also reading a note and, though the two glared at each other, they did not speak. They seldom did, except to quarrel, for M. Socrat held up the glories of France, and Mr. Gerlach insisted that there was no country like Germany, and that the French were a nation of barbarians.

Professor Socrat read his note half aloud.

"Et iss one surprisingness for me," he murmured. "Zat some unknown admirer should send me one historee of La Belle France! Ah, I kees my hands to heem who sends me zat book!" and, in his enthusiasm the impressionable Frenchman pressed the note to his lips. "A history of my beloved country," he went on, "written by ze foremost authority. Ah, zat iss grand! noble! I shall read it again and once again! Ah! ze history of France! Ze grandest countree in ze world!"

"Country of barbarians!" muttered the German, who had heard what his enemy had said.

"Land where they eat frogs und snails! Ugh! Der only country is der Vaterland!"

"Ha! Ha! Frogs an' ze snails!" exclaimed Professor Socrat, looking at the German. "True! we are of so delicate a nature zat we eat zem, but we do not eat pig-hog sausages, an' ze black bread! Ah! Ze rough, uncouth Germans!"

The two professors glared at each other, but disdained to hold further conversation. They advanced to the desk, one at a time, and Martin handed them each a package that had been left for them, but by whom the monitor did not know. Eagerly the odd teachers tore off the wrappings, and their surprise and chagrin can be imagined when it is stated that the French professor received a copy of a work praising the Germans to the skies, while Professor Gerlach found himself gazing upon the pages of a book that told of the glories of the French nation.

It was almost too much for them, and, in anger, they tossed the books aside, glared at each other, and hastened out, muttering unpleasant things about the respective nations, much to the delight of the watching boys. The professors remained on cool terms with each other for several days after that, for each one imagined the other had sent him the despised book.

"There," said Jack, to his chums, as they hurried away from the windows at the sight of Dr.

Mead and the other teachers, "I guess that will keep Professor Socrat so busy thinking that he won't even dream of the skeleton."

"Buzzing butterflies! That was great, Jack!" cried Nat. "How did you think of it?"

"Oh, it was an inspiration. I knew if I could get those two going at each other our secret was safe. So I just wrote a note to each of them, telling them that a friend was sending them a history of their beloved countries. That was true enough. I was the friend, only, somehow, I got the books mixed, and Socrat got Gerlach's, and *vice versa*, as the Esquimaux say. Howsomever, it's all right."

"All to the mustard," agreed Bony. "You have saved our reputations, Jack."

"We didn't have any to save," answered our hero with a laugh.

At that moment the progress of Jack and his chums across the campus toward the lecture hall, where they were soon to recite, was interrupted by a hail from a youth. He was a curious sort of lad, his face much freckled, and with a quiet, never-mind-what-happens-air about him. He was chewing gum, as he advanced, and, without removing it from his mouth, he addressed Jack.

"SamChalmerscallingyou," he gave utterance to, all in one word.

"Sam Chalmers is calling me?" repeated Jack.

"Yepoverthere," was the further reply.

"Over there; eh?" went on Jack. "Say, Budge Rankin, don't you ever get tired of chewing gum?"

"Not so's you could notice it," was the next conglomeration.

"Oh, well, we can't notice it very much," conceded Bony. "But what does Sam want?"

"Idunno," was Budge's reply, and the queer lad, who lived in Denton, and for whom Jack had secured a place as assistant janitor at Washington Hall, turned aside. "He's cominow," he added.

"Oh, he's coming now; is he?" repeated Jack. "Well, that's good. Now he can speak for himself," and he looked to see Sam Chalmers hurrying toward him. Sam was out of breath from running, and that was why his hail had not been heard by his chums. Budge Rankin, who was more of a chum with Jack and his friends, than he was a hired servant, had caught Sam's faint call, and so had halted the boys, to whom Sam evidently wished to speak.

"What's up, Sam?" asked Jack, as the running lad caught up to them. "Has some one left you a million dollars; or is it a letter from your best girl?"

"Great—news—fellows," panted Sam.

"What—kind—for — mercy's—sakes?" asked Jack, in mocking imitation of Sam's labored tones.

"Tell—you—in—a—minute. I—got—a letter—from—my—uncle——"

"Well, tell us the news, and don't beat all around the bush," begged Bony. "Out with it!"

"It's in this—letter—just—came," went on Sam, who was breathing more easily now. "He says he's going to Europe."

"That's no news," spoke Jack. "He goes there every year," for Sam's uncle, William Chalmers, was known to be quite wealthy.

"Wait until you hear the rest," advised Sam, with a twinkle in his eyes. "My uncle is going to Europe, and he isn't going to use his big gasoline cruising yacht *Sea Bird* this summer. He writes to say that I can have the use of her, if I wish. I can hire a crew, and take a party of my friends on a long cruise! How's that for news?"

"Hurrray!" yelled Bony Balmore, cracking his knuckles in double time.

"Wow!" came from Bob Movel.

"Slithering sea serpents!" ejaculated Nat.

"Wait until I play 'See, the Conquering Hero comes,' fellows," pleaded Fred Kaler, struggling to get his harmonica from his pocket.

"A motor cruising yacht," murmured Jack. "Great! I say, Sam, are we included among your friends?"

"You sure are," declared the lucky nephew, warmly. "We will make up a party, and go for

a long cruise. Along the New England Coast. Lobster suppers and crab dinners. Smell the ocean breezes! Dash through the storms on the coast! Camp out! Be pirates! Sail the bounding main! Wow!"

"Is it really true?" asked Jack, in some doubt.

"True? Of course it's true! Here's my uncle's letter. I'm to have the yacht as soon as school closes, and it can't close any too soon for me!" and Sam began dancing about, waving the letter over his head. We'll all go, fellows, and have the time of our lives."

"Sure," agreed Jack. "It certainly will be sport as is sport!"

At that moment Socker the janitor approached the group of lads, with a letter in his hand.

"Here's a note for you, Mr. Ranger," he said, handing Jack a missive.

"From your girl?" asked Bony, with a poke in Jack's ribs.

"No, from dad. He's gone out to the Pacific Coast on a trip. Thank's Socker. Did you hear the news? We're all going to become pirates, and live on Sam's uncle's yacht!"

"No? You don't tell me. That reminds me of the time when I was in the war, and going down the Mississippi——"

"Going down!" yelled Bob Movel, in imitation

of an elevator starter. "Come on, fellows, I'll stand treat for the sodas on the strength of Sam's news. Come on, Jack!"

"No, wait until I read this letter," was the reply, and our hero eagerly tore open the envelope.

CHAPTER IV

THE TREASURE BOX

JACK's chums halted a short distance off, waiting until he had finished his perusal of the missive. They saw a look of surprise come over his face, and wondered if he had received bad news. But Jack's exclamation a moment later reassured them.

"Hey, fellows; great news!" he cried.

"What kind?" asked Sam.

"I've fallen heir to a treasure box!"

"A treasure box?" repeated Nat. "Has Miss Mabel Pierce sent you a box of nuggets from the west?"

"Not quite," replied Jack. "Listen, I'll read you part of dad's letter. This is great! Immense!"

Jack turned over several pages of the missive, until he came to the part referring to the treasure box, and read:

" 'I am sending you, Jack, a small chest, or box, by express, and it has a somewhat curious history. It is said to be a treasure box, but what the treas-

ure consists of I don't know, for I haven't opened it, as the chest is fastened with a secret lock, and I couldn't get at the combination without destroying it. You and I will work over it when I get home, which will be soon.

“ ‘The box and the contents were given to me by an aged Spaniard named Miguel Montez, whom I befriended out here just before he died. He said the box and treasure belonged to him, as he was the last of his race, all his relatives being dead, the last of his kin perishing in the Martinique earthquake. So, being, as he declared, the sole heir to the treasure, he believed he could do as he liked with it, for it was all his now. Accordingly, he gave it to me in payment for what I did for him, though of course I didn't want anything.

“ ‘Montez said the box was used by members of his family to hold gold and silver ornaments and jewels during the frequent wars and raids of the early settlement days in California. I don't know whether this is true or not. In fact I don't know what is in the box, but it must contain something, as it is very heavy. Anyhow, we'll soon learn. I wish you would get it from the Denton express office, as soon as possible, put it in the bank safe deposit vault until I get home, and then we'll have a try at the secret lock.’

“Well, fellows, what do you think of that for

news?" asked Jack, as he put the letter in his pocket. "I guess little Jack is some pumpkins now, eh?"

"Treasure box!" repeated Nat. "Suffering Simoleens! I wish I had one."

"Think there'll be anything in it?" asked Bony.

"Well, it's worth taking a chance on," replied Jack. "I wish school was over, so I could go to Denton and see it."

"Only four days more," spoke Fred, playing softly on his mouth organ the tune: "How Sad This Parting."

"Yes, but four days—" began Jack, and then, as if struck by some sudden thought, he pulled out his father's letter, and looked at the date. Then he uttered an exclamation:

"By Jove, fellows, there's something wrong here!"

"Wrong? How?" asked Sam.

"Why, dad's letter is dated two weeks ago, and here I only get it to-day. It shouldn't have been more than a week coming from the coast—and the box—my treasure box——"

"Well?" asked Nat, as Jack hesitated.

"My treasure box was shipped the day before this letter was mailed, dad says. In that case it's been in Denton some time. Wow! Lying there in the express office! Maybe some one has opened it, and taken the treasure out! Maybe they've

even walked off with the box! Fellows, I'm going to leave for home at once, and claim my treasure!" and Jack, with a determined look on his face, wheeled around, and started for the dormitory building, where his room was located. Over his shoulder he flung back the words, like an echo to his chums:

"I'm going to get ready to go back home!"

"Hey!" called Sam Chalmers after him, "is that going to break up our yachting party?"

"Oh, I almost forgot about that," answered Jack, turning back. "No, indeed, Sam. Tell us more particulars. I guess I've got time to hear 'em, for I can't get a train to Denton right away. Give us some more facts, Sam."

"I don't know that there are any more, Jack."

"Oh, there must be. Where's the yacht now?"

"In New York. At the Erie basin, my uncle says in the letter."

"Is there a crew with it?"

"No, I'll have to arrange for one, my uncle states. The people in charge of the vessel will help me, though. I wonder whom we can get for a captain?"

"Captain Reeger would be all right," put in Nat. "The captain in charge of the *Polly Ann*, who once captured Jack and me," he explained to the others.

"Well, if he did a trick like that I shouldn't

think it would be safe to sail with him," was Bob Movel's opinion.

"Oh, Captain Reeger is all right, and a good friend of ours now," declared Jack. "He was forced to do what he did by that scoundrel Lavine. I'd trust Captain Reeger anywhere."

"So would I," added Nat.

"Then he may be the very person we need," went on Sam. "I don't know much about boats, especially gasolene cruisers. If Captain Reeger wants the job of piloting us along the New England coast for a summer of fun, he can have it. Uncle Bill is paying for it. He says he will stand all expenses."

"Well, how are we going to manage it?" asked Jack. "Shall we all meet in New York, on a certain date, and go aboard the *Sea Bird*?"

"That would be a good plan," answered Sam. "We will have to start from New York, so we might as well meet there. It will take some time to make all the arrangements, and so I think, as soon as school closes, I'll go on ahead, and hire Captain Reeger, if I can locate him, and also arrange about a crew. We won't need more than two men besides the captain and cook."

"I'll get Captain Reeger's address for you," said Jack. "I had a letter from him not long ago. But say, fellows, we ought to have some definite cruise mapped out. Come over to my rooms. I've

got a good chart of the New England coast, and you can lay out a plan, while I'm packing up to go after my treasure box. That will be better than going hap-hazard. Wow! But it makes me feel good to think about it! This is better than the phosphorescent skeleton!"

"Chillified chow-chow! I should say yes," added Nat, as they headed for Jack's room. "By the way, I wonder what's become of Snaith?" for, following his sudden expulsion, the bully had left his room in the school.

"Oh he's—" began Jack, and then he stopped, for, coming around the corner of the dormitory building where formerly he had had his apartment, was the lad in question. With him was Bert Mason, his most familiar crony. Snaith had heard Nat's remark concerning him, and the hot blood mounted to his face.

"So, you fellows aren't satisfied with driving me out of school, but you talk about me behind my back!" snapped Snaith, with a blustering air. "I wish you'd mind your own business! I guess I can come back to get my belongings without being insulted."

"Nobody insulted you," spoke Jack quietly. "We were just wondering what had become of you, and——"

"Who's talking to *you*, Ranger?" snarled the bully. "I'm not through with you yet. It was

you who originated the trick with the skeleton, and so annoyed my guests that the whole affair was given away. It was all your fault, and I'm going to make you pay for it, too. I'm not done with you, yet, Jack Ranger."

"Look here!" cried Jack, hotly, taking a step forward, and confronting Snaith. "I've stood just about all I'm going to from you. Now either you make good, or stop talking about what you're *going* to do. Get busy! if you want any satisfaction from me."

"I will!" growled Snaith, handing Mason a package he carried.

"It was your own fault that you were caught," went on Jack. "You had no business to have wine and cigarettes in your room, and you know it."

"Don't you dictate to me!" almost yelled the bully. "I've stood all I'm going to from you. I'm going to have satisfaction," and, before the others were aware of his intention, he had leaped forward and aimed a blow at Jack.

The latter stepped back quickly, but not in time to avoid Snaith's fist, which caught him lightly on the face. A dull red mark showed where it had landed, but the blow was a mere tap.

"Take care!" cried Jack. "This is no place for an argument like that," for they were on the campus, and all fights, of whatever kind, took

place on a favorite spot back of the lake boat-house, well away from observation from any of the faculty.

"I don't care anything about that!" cried Snaith. "I'm not a student here now, and I'll fight where I please. Are you afraid of me?"

"You know better than that," spoke Jack quietly.

"You *are* afraid! Why don't you hit back?" and, once more the senseless bully rushed at Jack, and aimed a savage blow. This time our hero was ready, and he cleverly dodged it. He would have been more than human not to have returned it. Jack's arm drew back, and his left fist shot forward. There was a dull sound as it landed on Snaith's chin, and the bully went over backward, falling on the grass, after a vain effort to maintain his balance.

"Wow! Good!" murmured Nat admiringly.

Jack stood ready, and waiting. Snaith jumped to his feet, with a snarl of rage.

"I'll—I'll knock you to pieces!" he spluttered.

Again he rushed at Jack, with savage energy, but this very savageness defeated his efforts. His right-hander was easy to dodge, and once more Jack sent his antagonist to the earth with a left-hander, straight from the shoulder. This time there was more power behind the blow, and Snaith

lay prone for several seconds, before he slowly arose.

"You'd better take him away, Mason," said Nat, in a low voice to Snaith's crony. "Ranger will pound him to jelly if this goes on. Besides, you know what it means to have a fight here. If he wants satisfaction we'll meet at the boathouse later."

"All right—but I guess he's had enough," remarked Mason, who was not a bad sort of a chap, save that he was too friendly with Snaith. "I'll get him away if I can."

It was no very difficult task now to persuade the bully to give over his attempt to chastise Jack. He stood blubbering at our hero, who smilingly awaited another onslaught. But none was forthcoming.

"You—you hit me with brass knuckles!" faltered Snaith. "Why don't you fight fair?"

"Dry up," ordered Mason. "You don't know what you're saying, nor when you've had enough. Come on, before Dr. Mead sees you, and has you arrested. He'd do it for fighting here, since you are no longer a student."

"That's all right, but—but I'll get even—" began the fat lad, and then, at a sight of Jack's flashing eyes, he did not finish the sentence.

"Come on," urged Mason again, and, linking

his arm in that of his crony's, the two moved slowly off the campus.

"Snapping soup tureens!" cried Ned, "that was a beaut—while it lasted."

"It was long enough," murmured Jack, as he swung into a stride alongside of Sam. "Let's forget it, and talk about our cruise."

"And your treasure box," added Nat.

"I'll soon know about that," went on Jack.
"I'm going back home this afternoon."

CHAPTER V

WHAT IS IN IT?

"GOING back home, Jack?" echoed Sam in great dismay, as he trailed after his chum.

"Before we celebrate the closing of Washington Hall?" added Bony.

"He doesn't mean it," put in Fred Kaler.

"Yes, I do," declared Jack. "Fellows, this may be a big thing, or it may not. At any rate,, I'm going on the assumption that there is some sort of a treasure in my box, and I've got to look after it. Through some unknown cause dad's letter was delayed, and my treasure box has been lying in the Denton express office for a week."

"It'll be safe there," declared Nat.

"Not on your life!" cried Jack energetically, if slangily. "That express office was robbed once, and I'm not going to take any chances. Me for Denton, and to get my treasure! I'm sure it is worth something, for dad isn't the one to be fooled, and he is a good judge of character."

"Going home just when the best fun of all the year is on tap," wailed Sam. "Why, we'll have no end of sport! There's Gerlach and Socrat to

indulge in their annual duel, under our supervision; and the midnight suppers, and burning the geometries, and singing around the old cannon, and—and—why, Jack, you simply *can't* go home."

"Got to, Sam. Wish I hadn't, but I've simply *got* to."

"Wire your aunts to go to the express office, and get the box," suggested Bony. "Then it will be safe."

"If I sent my aunts a telegram, they'd all have nervous prostration," declared Jack. "I wouldn't dare. They're as afraid of a message as they are of a black-bordered envelope. Once I wired them that I would be home a little ahead of time and when I got there I found they hadn't opened the message, but they were all sitting around the table, looking at the yellow envelope, crying, and wondering what undertaker they'd better hire to conduct the funeral of yours truly. Nope—dasn't do it, Bony."

"Well, then we've got to crowd some fun into to-night," was Sam's opinion. "Come on, fellows, we'll have a song-fest in honor of Jack's leaving."

"But what about the yachting trip?" asked Nat. "We haven't settled that, yet."

"I'll attend to that," declared Sam. "I'll make all arrangements, and then I'll come on to Denton and pick up you fellows. It's on my way to New York, and if Bony, Fred and Bob decide to

go, it's just as handy for them to come to Denton, and we can all go together."

Jack and Nat packed up, and, early the next morning, to the sleepy good-byes of a number of their chums, they started for Denton, agreeing to meet Sam and the others a little later, and begin the yachting trip.

"Well, I'm not sorry to get back to the old town," spoke Nat, as they neared Denton. "I'll be glad to see Fathead Farson, and some of the others of our bunch."

"Sure, and I'll be glad when my box is safe in the bank," declared Jack.

"What do you think is in it?"

"Well, it's hard to say, and yet I have an idea that it will contain some old Spanish jewelry, or possibly some specimens of Indian workmanship. Then there may be some gold and silver ornaments, that were kept in the Spaniard's family for sentimental reasons. Then, too, the old chap of whom dad got the box says that though the treasure was in the family for generations, it was not all used."

"That doesn't seem reasonable. For if Montez was in need of money he'd use some of the treasure, instead of giving it away," objected Nat.

"Not necessarily. Perhaps it might have been jewels, or some sort of rare ornaments, that he couldn't very well dispose of out on the coast. No,

I believe the treasure will be worth considerable, and I only wish dad was home now, so I could open the box, and see what it is."

"Maybe you can't get the box open."

"Oh, there'll be some way. If it was open once, it can be opened again. Besides, it will give us something to puzzle over. Hello, we're at Risedale. Next stop is Denton. I'll walk in and surprise my aunts. They don't expect me so soon."

"Before you get the treasure box?"

"No, I'm going to get that first. We'll stop in the express office when we leave the station. I have the receipt that dad sent for the package. I only hope it's safe."

"There's Fathead Farson," called Nat, as the train rolled into the Denton station.

"Don't bother with him now," suggested Jack. "He'll ask a dozen questions, and then the thing will be all over town. Keep mum about it. We'll slip into the express office, get the box, take it to the bank, and then go to my house. Then I'll have to wait until dad gets here."

It was with a feeling of no little uneasiness that Jack entered the express office, for he knew that to leave a valuable package around a railroad station, unclaimed for a week, was not conducive to its safe keeping.

"Hello, Mr. Sneed," he called to the agent, "have you a package for me lying around here?"

"Why, if it isn't Jack Ranger!" exclaimed Mr. Sneed, looking up from a pile of way bills. "Yes, I guess there's some sort of a box here for you. Been here some time. I was wondering when you'd come for it. I meant to tell your aunts about it, but it slipped my mind."

"Where is it?" asked Jack, trying not to seem anxious.

"Ha! Hum! Where did I put it?" asked the agent, looking around with a somewhat bewildered air. "I saw it yesterday—" he paused and stared in different corners.

Jack's heart sank. Were his fears to be realized?

"Oh, here it is, over here," went on Mr. Sneed. "I knowed I laid it somewheres. It was so plagued heavy that I put it on top of a pile of old reports, to sort of straighten 'em out. Must be a lot of lead in that box, Jack. I see it comes from away out in California."

"Yes, dad sent it to me. Here's the receipt. I'll sign for it, and take it right along."

"You'll find it pretty middlin' heavy. Ain't got gold in it; has it, Jack?" and the agent laughed.

"I wish it had," and Jack laughed in his turn. "I guess Nat and I can manage it, though."

He walked over to the corner where a box, about two feet long, a foot wide, and a foot deep rested on a pile of old office reports, and way

bills. It weighed them down considerably. As Jack was signing the receipt, having lifted one end of the box, and finding it quite heavy, a shadow darkened the door of the express office. Jack looked up, to see a short, dark-complexioned man, with a small black moustache, regarding him curiously.

"Please excuse," began the man, in oddly-accented English, "but I much wish to know—a—when do express things come in from California?"

"There's the agent," replied Jack, indicating Mr. Sneed.

"Ah, pardon!" exclaimed the foreigner, with a courteous bow. "I wish to ask, when does express stuff come here from California?"

"Wa'al, it comes every day, when there is any," answered Mr. Sneed.

"No, please excuse, you do not understand. I mean how much days—how long?"

"Oh, how long does it take stuff to come from California? Wa'al, about seven days. Why, are you expectin' a package?"

"No, I only wish to make inquiry. I have no package," and, with a murmured thanks, the man was gone.

"Queer chap," said Mr. Sneed.

"Stranger in town, I guess," remarked Jack. "Well, there is the receipt, Mr. Sneed, and Nat

and I will take the box along. Dad wants us to put it safely away. Got to take it to the bank."

"Ha! Then it must contain gold," declared the agent with a laugh. "But, say, why don't you take off the outer case? That'll make it lighter. It's evidently inside some other box, for that outer one has been made by some amateur carpenter."

"I guess you're right," agreed Jack. "I think we will open it, Nat. Then we can carry it better. Lend us a hammer, Mr. Sneed."

"Sure."

In a short time Jack and his chum had removed the rough outer box. Inside that they found another, wrapped in heavy paper, and, by tearing off a corner Jack could get his first glimpse of his treasure box. It was made from some red wood, evidently mahogany or teak, for it was very hard and dense.

"It's got handles on," said Nat, discovering them through the paper covering.

"Good. Now we'll hustle it right down to the bank, and then I'll go kiss my aunts, and wire dad that I have the box. Say, it's heavy enough, as it is," and Jack tugged at the case.

"Yes, it might contain gold after all," observed Nat. As he spoke he looked up. Gazing in on the two lads, who stood with the box between them, was the foreigner who had previously made the inquiry about the length of time it took stuff

to come from the Pacific coast. He had heard what Nat had said about gold, and Jack fancied he could detect a gleam in the man's dark eyes. But, a moment later the man had slipped away.

"Humph! There's that fellow again," said Jack. "He seems very anxious about something."

"Hope it isn't you and your treasure box," exclaimed Nat.

"Not so loud," cautioned Jack. "But come on, let's go to the bank. Guess I'll hire a carriage. This is too heavy to lug."

"What in the world *can* be in it?" ventured Nat.

"Give it up—for the present, anyhow. Come on."

"Say, if you fellers are going to the bank, you'd better git a move on," advised Mr. Sneed. "It's five minutes of three now, and they close at three."

"Great Scott!" cried Jack, in some dismay. "That's so. We can never make it, Nat."

"Hifaluting hoptoads! Not unless we got an auto," declared the other.

"There's not one around," replied Jack, looking along the station driveway. "We never can get to the bank on time."

"Can't you take it to your house, over night, Jack?"

"If I did, and my aunts imagined, as they would, that there was treasure in it, they'd never

sleep a wink all night, for fear of burglars. No, I couldn't do that. Besides, dad was particular to have it locked up as soon as I got it, and there's no place to lock it up safely in our house."

"It would be as safe in your house as it was here in the express office."

"Well, not exactly, for there is some one on duty here night and day. I can't get it to the bank, I can't take it home, I can't leave it here—" Jack paused, in a quandary. "I know what I'll do!" he exclaimed. "I'll take it to Judge Bennett's new office."

"Judge Bennett?" inquired his chum.

"Yes, he's our family lawyer, and he's handled our affairs ever since I was a baby. He has a big, fireproof safe in his new place, and my treasure box will be all right there over night. That's where we'll take it. Catch hold, Nat. It isn't far to his office."

Pleased with this solution of the difficulty, Jack's heart was lighter. Carrying the heavy box by the handles between them, he and Nat left the depot, and bent their steps toward Judge Bennett's office. They did not notice that, hiding in the shadow of the station, was the dark, foreign-looking man who had inquired about express packages. His black, beady eyes followed the boys, as they walked down the street, and, when they were far

enough off so that they would not observe him, he came out of the shadow.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, in Spanish, under his breath. "I think that is the package I am looking for. At last I have found the Fernandez box!"

All unconscious of the eager eyes watching them Nat and Jack hurried down the street.

CHAPTER VI

CALEB HERKIMER IS STARTLED

"SAY, this box is getting heavy," remarked Nat, as he and Jack neared Judge Bennett's office. "I guess it must contain something of value, after all. Maybe pig iron, or sheet lead."

"Quit your knocking," answered his chum. "You wait. I'll give you fellows a good shore dinner when we're off on our cruise, on the strength of my treasure box, and then we'll see who the joke is on. But step lively. We're almost there."

They changed hands, for the box seemed to increase in weight at every step, and soon they were ascending the stairs leading to Judge Bennett's office. To their relief they met neither Fathead Farson, nor any of their acquaintances, so they were not asked embarrassing questions.

The two boys set their burden down at the head of the steep flight of stairs, to get their breath, and, after waiting a moment, picked up the box again, and started down the long hall toward the entrance to the Judge's office.

Judge Bennett, the principal lawyer of Den-

ton, was, as Jack had said, familiar with the affairs of the Ranger family since our hero could remember. He had been partly instrumental in arranging the western matter, so that Mr. Ranger could safely return to the east, and Jack's three maiden aunts never took any important step without consulting Judge Bennett. So it was natural that Jack, when he found that it was impossible to leave his treasure box in a bank vault, should turn to his own and his father's friend.

"I hope we find him in," remarked Jack, as he motioned for Nat again to lift his end of the box. "I'd hate to have to cart this around much farther."

"Oh, I guess he'll be in, it's early yet—for lawyers," and Nat took hold of the handle.

The building in which the new office of Judge Bennett was located was over the hardware store of Mr. James Squire, and there were several other offices in the same structure, all reached by a common stairway, the various apartments opening off a single long hall, or corridor. There was a real estate office, a dentist's parlor, and a barber shop, all on the one floor. The offices occupied by Judge Bennett were at the far end of the hall, and consisted of three rooms. First, the outer, or waiting room, then a slightly larger one, used by Mr. Caleb Herkimer, the judge's private secretary and clerk, and then came a large room, where the

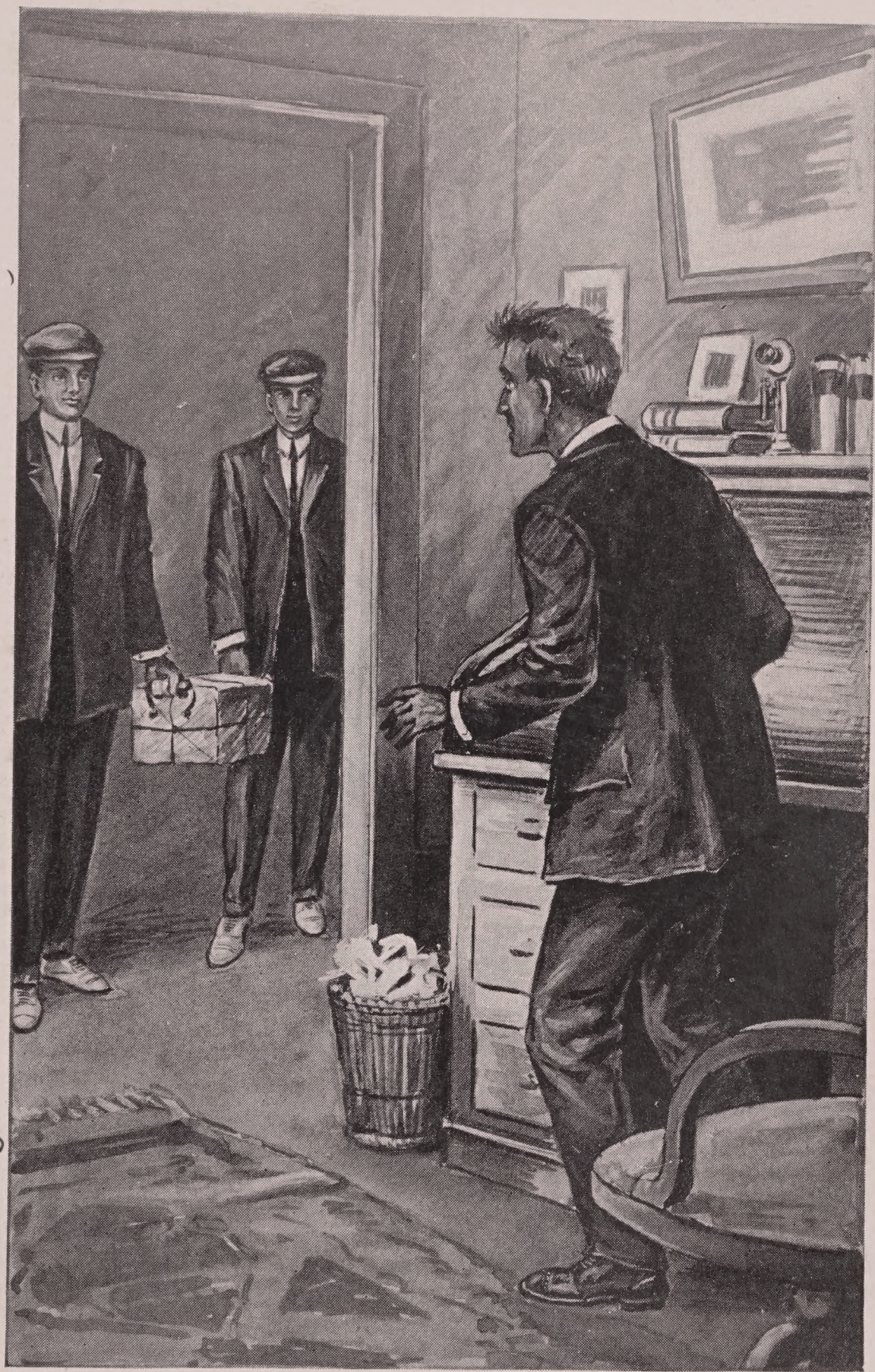
judge had his private office. Though called a "Judge," Mr. Bennett was no longer on the bench, but devoted his time to private practice.

I have thought it best to describe thus particularly the judge's office, in view of what happened afterward, so that you might more readily understand the situation.

Down the long hall walked Jack and Nat, their feet making no sound, for they wore rubber-soled tennis shoes, that being a fad affected by the Washington Hall students that year. Jack and his chum had donned theirs when they left that morning, and they found them very comfortable to travel in. Thus, almost noiselessly, they approached the office of Mr. Bennett, and, neither of them spoke, for they were somewhat out of breath from their hurried trip from the station, carrying the heavy box.

Jack, without knocking, opened the outer door, and, followed by Nat, advanced into the middle of the apartment.

A curious sight met Jack's eyes. He could see right through the next two rooms, into the judge's private office, and, instead of the genial face of his elderly friend, he was confronted by the somewhat smirking and sneaking gaze of Mr. Caleb Herkimer, the confidential clerk. Mr. Herkimer was bending over the opened desk of Judge Bennett, and was sorting a number of legal papers,



"HA! WHAT—WHO—WHAT DO YOU WANT?" FAIRLY
SNARLED MR. HERKIMER.

which, as soon as he caught sight of the two lads, he thrust into a pigeon hole, and then he closed down the rolling cover of the desk with a crash.

"Ha! What—who—what do you want?" fairly snarled Mr. Herkimer. "Coming in this way—what does it mean? Don't you know you should have knocked? Was that door unlocked? I was sure I locked it——"

He paused in some confusion. His hands were trembling, and Jack saw him furtively slip some papers into his pocket.

"What do you mean——?" went on the clerk, and then, as he realized that he was taking the wrong course, or, perhaps, recognizing who his visitors were, he added:

"Oh, it's you, Jack Ranger, and Nat Anderson. I didn't know you at first. You surprised me, coming in so suddenly. I thought I had locked the door, as I was going over some papers in an important case, and I didn't want to be disturbed. Yes, you surprised me—coming in so suddenly," and Mr. Herkimer glanced at the judge's desk, as if to make sure it was closed, and his shifty eyes roved about the room, as if seeking to learn whether he had dropped any papers in his hurried move. Then he looked at Nat and Jack.

"You came in so suddenly—so quietly——" he went on, aimlessly.

"Yes," spoke Jack, the first word he had uttered

since he had entered. "We have rubber-soled shoes on. I forgot that we didn't make any noise. I'm sorry we disturbed you, Mr. Herkimer, but you see I'm in the habit of entering without knocking——"

"Oh, that's all right. That's all right," the clerk hastened to say. "No harm done, I assure you. Only—you—you startled and—surprised me," and he seemed to get the words out with a jerk.

"I came to see Judge Bennett," went on Jack. "I have something which I wish to leave with him over night—in his safe, as the banks are closed. Is he——"

"Yes, the judge is out," went on Mr. Herkimer.

"Why, we only wanted to leave this box with him," said Jack. "I wish he'd put it in the safe, over night. It contains——"

"It's Jack Ranger's treasure box!" interrupted Nat with a laugh, and, the instant he had spoken he regretted the words, for there was a curious, crafty gleam in the eyes of Caleb Herkimer, and his lean, bony hands seemed to twitch nervously.

"We don't know whether it's treasure or not," exclaimed Jack, with just the trace of reproof toward Nat. "It comes from my father, out west, and he directed me to put it in a bank vault. As the bank was closed when we started to take it

there, I thought the judge's safe would be a good place for it over night."

"No place better!" interrupted Mr. Herkimer with rather a nervous laugh. "It will be as secure there, Jack, as in the bank. I'll lock it up in the judge's safe for you, with pleasure. I have the combination. He will be back in the morning, and then you can claim it."

He was standing on the threshold of the middle room—his own particular apartment—and Nat and Jack were in the outer office. Mr. Herkimer advanced, and picked up the box that the two lads had set down. He slipped it into a vacant space in the big, roomy safe.

"There," said Mr. Herkimer, as he closed the heavy steel doors and turned the dial. "The treasure box is safe, now," and he laughed at his little joke.

"If the judge gets here before I do in the morning," said Jack, "will you please explain matters to him?"

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Herkimer. "But he is not likely to be here early. But wait, I will set the time lock. Now, the safe cannot be opened until nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and, if you wish, you may be here at that time, and take out your treasure box yourself," and, suiting the action to the word, he shifted the lever of the time lock on the massive safe.

"Well, I'll sleep better than if that box was in the house, and so will my aunts," remarked Jack. "Much obliged, Mr. Herkimer. Come on, Nat, we'll be going."

As Jack and Nat left the building, where the treasure box now reposed, they nearly collided with a small, dark man, who turned quickly aside, and murmured an apology. He was a man with a small black moustache, and he spoke with a foreign accent.

"Did you notice him?" asked Nat, as he and his chum passed down the street.

"Not particularly—why?"

"He was the fellow who was at the express office."

"Well, what of it?"

"Oh nothing, I guess." But if Nat and Jack had heard what the small, dark man muttered as they passed on, they would not have thought it was "nothing."

CHAPTER VII

FUN WITH FATHEAD FARSON

"COME on over to-night," invited Jack, as he and his chum parted at a street corner, Nat to go to his home, and Jack to the residence of his three aunts. "We'll go out and do the town—see some of the fellows, and have some fun."

"Sure, I'll be on hand. So long!"

"So long!"

Jack, with his characteristic energy, fairly burst in upon his aunts. They were in the sitting room, where they spent part of every afternoon, and they must have thought a miniature cyclone had broken loose when their nephew entered.

"Hello, Aunt Angelina! How are you, Aunt Josephine? Give us a kiss, Aunt Mary!" and the lad rushed first from one of the dear old ladies to the other, leaving a kiss and a hug with each, and also sundry other remembrances, such as ruffled collars, disarranged cuffs, tousled hair, scattered hairpins, and crushed dresses.

"Why, Jack Has anything happened?" gasped Aunt Mary.

"Did the school burn down?" Aunt Josephine wanted to know.

"Are you ill, Jack?" demanded Aunt Angelina.

"Bless and save us! Why are you home so soon, when school doesn't close for three days yet?" asked Aunt Mary.

"Tell you all later," was Jack's breathless reply. "Just now I'm as hungry as two little bears and a big one. Is there anything in the house to eat? Have you heard from dad? I have. My! but it's good to get home! What's in the pantry? I want some of your cookies, Aunt Mary. Any jam left, Aunt Angelina? How about the pickles, Aunt Josephine? I'll have to kiss you all over again, for I promised Nat Anderson I would. Here goes!" and he made a rush.

"Don't! Don't!" pleaded Aunt Mary. "You can have anything you want, Jack, but I've just got my hair so it stays up, and you'll tumble it all down, and we expect the minister to tea."

"The minister to tea! Hopping hymn books! as Nat would say. Then I'm going to clear out. Give me something to eat in the kitchen, and I'll go over to Nat's house."

"Jack!" remonstrated Aunt Mary.

"Jack Ranger!" pleaded Aunt Josephine.

"Jack Donnith Ranger!" gasped Aunt Angelina, giving our hero his complete and seldom-used name.

"All right! I'll be good. I'll stay and try to look pious, though it's so long since I've talked with our minister that I'll get all twisted. But I'd do anything for you, aunties. Guess I'll kiss you all again!"

There was a hurried retreat to the hall on the part of the elderly ladies, and they would not return until Jack promised to behave. Then, by degrees, he told them the reasons why he had come back from school a little ahead of time.

"Fancy, a treasure box! A treasure box in the family!" exclaimed Aunt Angelina. "Oh, Jack, tell us all about it."

Jack did, to the best of his ability, but it was not much that could be said on the subject, until the box was opened.

"But don't you think Mr. Herkimer acted rather funny, Jack?" asked Aunt Josephine, when our hero had told of how he and Nat had surprised the clerk.

"Well, it did seem so, at first, and yet perhaps he was working over the papers in some important case, and when we went in so quietly it may have alarmed him. He evidently thought he had locked the outer door, but he forgot it."

"Queer he should be puttering over papers on the judge's desk," commented Miss Mary. "The judge is very particular about his desk. I remember once, several years ago, when I was in his

office, and Caleb Herkimer was then only a mere boy, and had just gone to work for Mr. Bennett, that the judge told him never, under any circumstances, to touch anything on his desk."

"Well, he certainly was rumpling up the papers in great shape this afternoon," declared Jack. "He took some out, too, or I'm mistaken. Well, 'when the cat's away the mice will have pumpkin pie for supper,' as the book says. Speaking of pie, do I get any?"

"Oh, Angelina, we *must* hurry tea!" exclaimed Aunt Josephine. "The minister will be here before we know it. Jack, dear, do behave yourself, won't you?"

"I will if you'll give me a kiss, Aunt Jo."

"Oh, Jack, will you ever get over your foolish ways?" sighed his aunt, but, no little pleased at his request, she submitted to his caress. Then the other aunts had to undergo the ordeal, which was not such a terrible one after all, to them, I guess. Then they hurried with supper, while Jack read another letter from his father that had been sent to Denton for him, and was awaiting him there. In this Mr. Ranger said he would arrive within a day or two.

"And then we'll solve the mystery of the treasure box," thought Jack.

True to his promise, Jack was a credit to his aunts when the minister arrived to partake of sup-

per, and, if our hero's conversation was not exactly edifying, being mostly about baseball and school sports, the minister seemed to like it, and declared to the aunts, later, that Jack was a lad after his own heart, whereat the hearts of the three maiden ladies grew warm with pleasure.

It was not long after the meal that Jack, who was sitting in the parlor, helping to entertain the reverend gentleman, with Aunt Angelina, while her sisters washed the dishes, suddenly jumped up, on hearing a whistle outside.

"There's Nat," he remarked. "Guess I'll go out for a while, Aunt Angelina."

"Nat? Is that Nat Anderson?" asked the minister; "your chum of whom you have spoken? I should like to meet him. Bring him in."

"Yes, do," added Aunt Angelina.

"I—er—I don't think—Nat's awful bashful," stammered Jack, for he knew Nat would never forgive him, if he led him into such a dilemma as that represented by three elderly ladies, and a minister. "I—I guess I'd better go out to him," went on Jack, "and if I can get him to come in I will," and, not pausing for any change in the program, Jack hurried out and joined Nat, who was wondering what was keeping his chum indoors on such a fine evening.

"You had a narrow escape," was Jack's comment.

"How's that?"

"Minister wanted to meet you. I just managed to skip out. I told 'em I'd bring you in if I could."

"Wow! Come on, let's run!" exclaimed Nat, and the two, not from any fear of evil in their hearts, but from an inborn and perhaps unreasonable prejudice toward anything that savored of sanctimoniousness, fled down the street.

"Where'll we go?" asked Jack.

"Oh, down by the post-office. There'll be some of the fellows there."

"All right," and Jack slowed down his pace to a walk. A little later, as he turned up a short street, which was not in the direct way to the post-office, Nat asked.

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, I thought I'd walk past Judge Bennett's office."

"What for? Want to see if your treasure box is there?"

Jack laughed, a bit uneasily.

"Well, perhaps it's foolish of me," he said, "but I have a nervous feeling about that box, Nat. To tell you the truth, I didn't like the way Caleb Herkimer acted. It may have been all right, but—I wonder if he could have been drinking?"

"There isn't a more strictly temperance man in town."

"That's what I thought. Still, he acted mighty

queer. Maybe he was worried over some law case. Anyhow, we saw him lock the safe, and put the time catch on. Guess I'm just nervous, that's all."

By this time they were in front of the judge's office. The entire building was dark, save for a light at the lower entrance of the stairs, and one in the dentist's office, where he could be seen moving about behind the sash curtains.

"Your treasure is all right—the judge's office is as dark as a pocket, and the building is still there," remarked Nat.

"That's more than you can say for that fellow's tooth," added Jack, with a grim chuckle, for at that moment there was a yell from the opened window of the dentist's office, and, from the shadow-pictures on the curtain, it was evident that some one had just had a tooth pulled. The two lads walked on, our hero somewhat easier in his mind.

"If there isn't Fathead Farson!" suddenly exclaimed Jack a little later as he observed a jelly-faced, indolent, wall-eyed lad, who was a sort of lazy town character. "How are you, Fathead?"

"Please don't call me Fathead," pleaded the lad. "My name is Archie."

"Oh, very well, Archibald—where art thou, Archibald?" asked Nat mockingly.

"No, not Archibald—just Archie," begged the lad, who was sensitive about his name.

"All right, Archie," agreed Jack, with a wink at Nat. "Won't you come and have some ice-cream soda?" and he nudged his chum.

"Sure, come ahead," urged Nat, knowing there was a joke in it somewhere, and willing to assist Jack in carrying it out.

"Honest?" demanded the fat lad, as if in doubt, and when assured that the invitation was genuine, Fathead followed our two friends down the street.

"What flavor, Archie?" inquired Jack, when the three were seated on the little stools in front of the marble counter.

"I'll have pineapple."

"Make it double strength for Mr. Farson," said Jack to the drug clerk, with a wink. "And you want it good and sweet, don't you, Archie?"

"Oh, yes, as sweet as you can make it!" exclaimed the wall-eyed lad. Jack and Nat gave their orders, and soon the soda was set before them.

"Take your cues from me now, Nat," whispered Jack to his chum. "Play into my hands, and we'll give Fathead a scare. He needs one."

"Sure," agreed Nat. The drug store contained no one but the clerks and the three lads at this time. Jack, after finishing his soda, waited until Fathead had drained the last dregs from his glass.

Then, picking up Fathead's tumbler in its nickeled holder, smelled of it.

"Why—why!" he exclaimed in simulated horror.

"What's the matter?" asked Nat eagerly.

"This—this soda!" went on Jack, with a tragic air. "I wonder how that poison got into it?"

"Poison?" gasped Archie, with his face growing pale. He placed his hands over his stomach. "Poison?"

"Poison?" queried Nat.

"Just as sure as you're a foot high!" went on Jack, handing his chum the glass. "Smell! That clerk must have put in prussic acid by mistake! Can't you smell it, Nat—just like peach pits, you know?"

"It certainly is prussic acid," agreed Nat, after several strong sniffs of the empty glass. "A terribly powerful dose, too. Oh, this is awful!"

"Oh, am I going to die?" wailed Fathead, looking for a soft spot whereon to fall upon the floor.

"Prussic acid is the deadliest drug known," went on Jack solemnly. "I don't see how that clerk made the mistake. Hey!" he called to the young soda dispenser, at the same time winking at him, "how does it come that you put prussic acid in Archie's soda?"

"I—I didn't mean to," declared the clerk, enter-

ing into the joke. "It was a mistake. I—I hope——"

"Get him an antidote at once!" thundered Jack. "Castor oil is good; isn't it?"

"Best thing in the world," added Nat.

"Oh, I never can take castor oil!" cried Fathead. "Never!"

"Then it's all up with him," went on Jack, solemnly. "Do you see the purple patches beginning to come out on him?"

"Sure. All over his face," answered Nat, pretending to look closely.

"He does look bad," agreed the drug clerk, and that was the truth, for Fathead was anything but a beauty.

"Oh! Oh!" wailed the unpopular lad, writhing about. "Send for a doctor. Oh! I've got such a pain! I'm burning up inside! I thought that soda tasted queer!"

"That's the way prussic acid always works," declared Jack. "Give him some castor oil—quick!"

"I can't—I can't take it!" sobbed Fathead. "It tastes too bad!"

"You must!" insisted Nat. "Come on, fellows, we'll have to pour it down him. It's the only thing that will save him."

"And it must be swallowed pure—nothing in it to take away the taste," insisted Jack.

"Oh! Oh! I can't bear even the smell of it!" cried the fat lad. "Isn't there something else just as good?"

"Nothing but castor oil for prussic acid," declared the clerk, and amid the ill-concealed laughter of his fellows, Nat and Jack, a liberal dose of the compound was administered to Fathead. He managed to get it down, but he felt worse than ever.

"Oh! Oh!" he moaned. "I'll sue somebody for this if I die."

"There's no such danger," murmured Jack. "Think he'd better have a little more oil, Jim?" this to the clerk.

"Well, a little more would make it sure."

"Oh, I can't take another drop!" fairly yelled the victim.

"Then hurry home, and stay in bed for two days, and I guess you'll be well," said Jack. "Hurry, Fathead!"

With much groaning and tribulation the wall-eyed lad hurried out of the store, and the last they saw of him he was legging it down the street at a good pace.

"I guess it will be some time before he speaks to us again," concluded Jack, and he was right. Fathead learned later of the trick that had been played on him, and he vowed vengeance on Jack

and Nat, but it was a long while before his chance came.

Leaving the drug store, Jack and Nat, soon afterward met a number of their friends, and, as the evening was warm, our hero proposed that they go to a nearby ice-cream parlor and cool off. The suggestion was at once carried unanimously. Jack and his friends were soon occupying a number of tables, and keeping the girl waitresses busy serving the frozen confection. As our hero was paying the checks at the desk, preparatory to going out, he dropped a coin. Stooping to pick it up, he brushed against a gentleman and lady who were just entering the place. Murmuring an apology, Jack stepped to one side, and brought up against Nat, who was close beside him.

As he did so he had a glimpse of the newcomers, and, to his surprise he beheld the same dark foreigner who had made the inquiries at the express office, and who, later, had been met with outside Judge Bennett's office. But it was not the man who held Jack's attention so much as did the face of the woman—or, rather, girl—who was with him. Jack had one look into her eyes, black as coals, and he felt as if they went right through him. For an instant the two gazed at each other, then a deep glow of red suffused the olive-tinted cheeks of the girl, whose beauty was of the Spanish type. She murmured something to the man

at her side, and he replied in Spanish, shooting a keen glance at Jack. A moment later they had passed into the rear room, where the ice-cream tables were, and Jack and his friends went out.

"Gee, she was a beauty!" exclaimed Russell Mortimer, one of the boys, in earnest but respectful admiration.

"I should say yes," added Nat. "But that fellow looked fierce enough to stick a knife into you, if you looked at her."

"She looked at Jack, all right," observed Frank Anson.

"How about it, Jack?" asked Nat, with a nudge.

"Oh, cut it out," replied Jack, with a little laugh. Nevertheless it was some time before he forgot the look the black-eyed girl had given him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TREASURE BOX IS GONE

JACK RANGER was up early the next morning. In fact, he was never one to lie long abed, but, on this occasion, he had a special reason for arising a little ahead of his usual time. He planned to get his treasure box from the judge's office, and take it to the bank vault.

He had two reasons for doing this, aside from the main one that his father had requested him to do so. He wanted to have a look at the peculiar lock, or fastening, which he had not had a chance to examine the day previous. And, though he did not admit this to himself in so many words, he was a bit anxious about the security of the box. He knew the safe in the judge's room was burglar proof, and he knew the building had not burned in the night, or he would have heard of it. But he could not get out of his mind the odd actions of Caleb Herkimer.

He called for Nat, before his chum had yet had his breakfast, and explained his intentions.

"There's no good in going to the judge's office now, Jack," said Nat, yawning, and stretching.

"Why not?"

"Because the time lock is set for nine o'clock, and the safe can't be opened until then. It's only half-past seven now. Don't be in such a rush. Wait until I eat, and I'll hit the trail with you. I was going fishing to-day. Come along?"

"Sure, after I attend to the box."

It seemed as if nine o'clock would never come, and when the clock hands pointed to eight-thirty, Jack, who with Nat was sitting on the latter's front porch, said:

"Oh, hang it all, I'm going down to the office. I can explain to the judge what dad wants done, and by that time the time lock will have operated, and the safe can be opened. Come on."

They strolled down the street, greeting several friends on the way. They had a glimpse of Fat-head Farson, but the fat bully, at the sight of them, dodged around the corner.

"I guess he'll keep out of our way for a spell," remarked Nat, grimly.

"Sure," assented Jack. "I'm getting rather tired of playing tricks on him, though. He's too easy."

They entered the reception room, and as they did so Judge Bennett looked up from his desk in the farther apartment. Jack was at once struck by a peculiar expression on the lawyer's face. He looked careworn, and alarmed, and the usual neat

clothing of the old gentleman was all awry, while his white hair, usually combed so smoothly over the bald spot on his head, stood up, as if he had ruffled his hands through it many times.

"Good morning, Judge," greeted Jack.

"Ah! Good morning—Oh, it's Jack Ranger! Come on in, Jack. And Nat Anderson—walk right in——" and then the lawyer, with a puzzled look on his face, pulled out paper after paper from the pigeon holes of his desk. The worried and anxious look on his face seemed to deepen, and he did not glance at the boys after his first greeting.

"Is anything the matter—has anything happened, Judge?" asked Jack, for there was something vaguely alarming in his old friend's manner.

"Anything happened? No—that is—yes—I don't know—I don't see why Caleb isn't here," murmured the lawyer.

Then, for the first time, the boys were aware, as they looked into the middle room, that the clerk was not in his accustomed place.

"Perhaps Mr. Herkimer is ill," suggested Jack.

"Perhaps," admitted the lawyer. "And yet I can't understand it. If he was ill he would have sent me some word—and my desk—it's all in disorder—several papers are missing—I wonder——" Then turning to Jack, he asked:

"Did you want to see me?"

"I came to get my treasure box," explained Jack, and after relating how his father had sent it to him, he told how Caleb Herkimer had locked it in the safe the night before. "It's nine o'clock now," went on the youth, as he looked at his watch, "so I suppose the time lock can be worked."

"Certainly, certainly," spoke the judge quickly. "I wonder why Caleb didn't leave a note for me, though, in an important matter like that? But, as you say, he may be ill. Still, I can't account for the missing papers—and my desk in such disorder. He had strict instructions never to open it."

The boys, hearing this, thought of the scene they had witnessed the previous afternoon.

"A treasure box; eh, Jack?" went on the Judge, stepping away from his desk, and approaching the big safe. "I congratulate you."

"Wait until we see what's in it," suggested Jack, with a laugh. "It may contain nothing but old iron."

"Oh, hope not—I hope not," spoke the judge as he swung open the massive doors.

Eagerly Jack and Nat peered forward. They knew from the position of the treasure box in the safe, that it would be the first thing to greet their eyes.

Yet, as they looked when the massive doors were wide open, there was nothing like the chest to be seen. There was no box in the safe. The

treasure, which Caleb Herkimer had so carefully locked up, was gone, and the very size of the box precluded the possibility of it being in any inner compartment.

"The box—my treasure box—it's gone!" gasped Jack.

"Gone?" echoed Nat.

"Gone!" repeated Jack, blankly.

The lawyer quickly opened an inner door of the strong box. He revealed a small compartment. It was empty.

"Robbed!" he cried. "The safe has been robbed! The five thousand dollars I left in there has been taken! I've been robbed, and—and your treasure box is gone, too, Jack! But I'll get it back! I'll get back my money! I know who took it. That's why he wasn't here! That's why my desk has been ransacked! That's where those valuable papers are! Caleb Herkimer has robbed me and you, Jack! We must notify the police at once and get the detectives after him! He has your treasure box."

CHAPTER IX

THE DETECTIVES ARRIVE

JACK stared blankly at Judge Bennett. Then he looked into the safe that had held his treasure box. There was no doubt that it was missing. Our hero next looked around the room, as if in hopes that the clerk might, after all, have left the chest behind somewhere. The lawyer knew of what his client was thinking.

"No, Jack, it isn't here," he said, more calmly. "For some time past I have suspected Caleb Herkimer of underhanded practices, though not of downright dishonesty. I should have discharged him, but I had a number of matters to occupy my attention of late, and I thought he might turn over a new leaf. But he did not. He watched his chance, and, when I was away, he robbed me."

"But how could he get into the safe when the time lock was on?" asked Nat. "Slabsided spalapeenes! We saw him put the clock catch on, didn't we, Jack? He set the time lock while we were here."

"Ha! that accounts for it," remarked the judge, as if he had thought of something. "That's why

Caleb made such a fuss about that lock. You see," the lawyer continued, turning to the boys, "the time lock on my safe is not a regular one. I had it attached after the safe was purchased, and it is not of the latest pattern. In fact it never worked well, and, of late, neither Caleb nor I have used it, for it was slightly out of order, and I did not bother to have it fixed. The clock part ran all right, and could be set, but the bolts did not slide, and, as for locking the safe by the time arrangement, you might as well have wedged the door tight with a toothpick."

"But we saw Mr. Herkimer set it," insisted Jack.

"I know, but he only *pretended* to do it. Why, he even left a note for me, hanging on the safe door, saying that he had fixed the time lock, and that it was set for nine o'clock this morning. I believed him, but—look here——" Mr. Bennett showed that the bolts of the time lock could be moved with his finger, without the handle attached to them being operated, proving that the lock was out of order.

"Then we needn't have waited until nine o'clock to open the safe?" asked Nat.

"No," answered the Judge. "But Caleb took that means of delaying, as long as possible, the discovery of his crime. I believed what he wrote in the note, about the lock, and didn't try to oper-

ate it until nine. As a matter of fact I could have opened the safe as soon as I got here. But the discovery of the upset condition of the papers in my desk took all my attention."

"And my treasure box is gone," repeated Jack, mournfully. "And I didn't have a chance to see what was in it! Dad will be cut up about this. He warned me to take good care of it, and now——"

"You couldn't help it," said Nat. "Gallop gallowogs! You never suspected Caleb Herkimer."

"No one would, unless he had seen some suspicious acts of his, of late," declared the judge. "He waited his chance until I was away, and the safe held a large sum of money of mine, some valuable papers belonging to my clients, and your box. Then he committed the theft. Was your box heavy, Jack? Would he need help in carrying it away?"

"Well, not so heavy, as it was awkward to carry," replied our hero. "Nat and I could either of us have lifted it alone, but it was unhandy for one person to get along with."

"I was asking to decide whether or not Caleb had had any help," the lawyer went on. "But we must lose no time; I'll notify the local police, and then I'll send for a private detective. We must get right to work. Now tell me all about your

box, and give me the details once more of how you came to leave it here." Which Jack did, being prompted by Nat occasionally. They related how they had passed the building that night, and how they had seen the shadow, and heard the cries of a man having a tooth extracted.

"Good!" exclaimed Judge Bennett. "Perhaps the dentist will be able to give us a clue. He must have been here late. But I'll let the detectives do that part of it. I'll notify the police of Denton, and have them see if they can get any trace of Caleb. I'll have them go to his home. To think, after all the years I have employed that man, and the many favors I have done him, that he should repay me this way! He must have been gambling or speculating, and so fallen into debt. Poor Caleb, I didn't think it of you!" and the lawyer sighed.

Events had happened so suddenly, and the discovery of the disappearance of his treasure box had so startled Jack, that he hardly yet realized its loss. Hoping against hope, he looked all about the three rooms of the judge's office, but there was no trace of the box.

"Now we'll have to get busy," went on Mr. Bennett, briskly. "You boys will have to help. For the present say nothing to any one, but go quietly to the police station, and ask the chief to step to my office. I could telephone, but some

one might overhear it. In the meanwhile I will telegraph to a firm of private detectives. I have employed them before, for some of my clients. I never thought I'd need them for myself."

In a short time Chief Bandford, of the Denton police, was in the lawyer's office. He at once agreed to make quiet inquiries for Caleb Herkimer. A reply was also received from the private detective agency, stating that two men would be in Denton that afternoon. There was little else to be done after this, and Jack and Nat left the office.

In about an hour they made their way back to hear possible news. The chief had just gone, and had merely been able to report that Caleb Herkimer had left his home early the previous evening, and had not returned. As he had no relatives in town, and merely boarded with an elderly couple, they were unable to throw any light on his movements.

"Did the chief ask the railroad agent if Herkimer bought a ticket for out of town?" asked Jack.

"I'm leaving all that for the regular detectives," said the judge. "They'll know better how to make those inquiries without causing too much suspicion. They should be here soon, now."

The two detectives arrived two hours later.

They were quiet, unassuming men, and one would never have supposed them to be tracers of criminals. They went right to work, and, inside of an hour they had ascertained that Caleb Herkimer had purchased a ticket for New York, having bought it at Far Hills, two stations beyond Denton, but within easy driving distance.

"And did he have my box with him?" asked Jack, eagerly.

"Hard to say," replied the detective, whose name was Tyler, his companion being Jenkert. "Mr. Herkimer checked a trunk that may have contained your box, as well as the five thousand dollars belonging to the judge, and his private papers as well."

"Is there any way of tracing him farther?" asked Nat.

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Jenkert. "We'll get busy in New York, now. Just as soon as we have finished here."

"Why, what more is there to learn?" asked Jack, in some surprise. "You have found that Mr. Herkimer left town with my box, and——"

"Yes, but we haven't exhausted the possibilities here," declared Detective Tyler. "It looks now as if Caleb Herkimer was all alone in this, yet he may have had accomplices. I think you said something about a dentist in the building be-

ing at work rather late last night?" and the officer looked at the judge.

"Yes, these lads saw him. Jack, just ask Dr. Parker to kindly step here," and, while waiting for the dentist, the two detectives began a systematic inspection of the judge's rooms.

CHAPTER X

A NEW CLEW

QUITE a nervous little man was Dr. Parker. He hustled into the judge's office, fairly slammed himself down into a chair, and crossed and uncrossed his legs, drummed with his fingers on the table near which he sat, and then, peering about, as if seeking to discover whether any one present had any aching molars, or an eye tooth that needed filling:

"Well, Judge Bennett," he spoke, "I'm sorry to hear that you've had quite a loss."

"We hope you will be able to furnish a clew," interposed Detective Jenkert.

"Who, me? Oh, no! No! Never, my dear detective. I know nothing about the ways of criminals, though once I was called into the jail to extract an aching tooth from a boy who had been arrested for throwing a baseball through a window. But then, he was not what one might call a real criminal. No, I have no knowledge of criminals. None whatever," and the little dentist nervously crossed his legs in the opposite direc-

tion, and, straightway, resumed his former attitude.

Then, after considerable explaining, it was pointed out to him that, having been in his office rather late the previous evening, he might have seen, or heard, some suspicious persons about in the judge's office. This put the matter in a new light, and the little dentist, after considering the case, thoughtfully replied:

"Now I come to think of it, perhaps I may be able to furnish a clew. I was in my office, as you have said. I was extracting a large molar from the jaw of a man who gave me considerable trouble. He——"

"We heard him yell," explained Jack.

"Yes, he was a very obstinate person. He would not take gas, nor would he let me use cocaine. Consequently there was considerable pain. But that was not what I started to say. In consequence of the tooth being a hard one to extract I had to use a number of instruments. Then, when the patient had gone, I remained to clean them, and get my office in order. So it was rather late when I left. I don't know the exact time. In fact my watch had stopped, so, even if I had looked at it, I would not have been able to tell——"

"Well, what *did* you see?" interrupted Detective Tyler, who was getting a bit impatient.

"I'm coming to that part directly," went on Dr. Parker, in no manner disturbed. "As I was walking down the dark hall of this building, on my way out, and it was dark, you understand, because I had turned out the light in my office, and the only other one was at the foot of the stairway. As I was walking down the dark hall, you understand, I passed your office, Judge Bennett. As I came opposite your door I thought I saw a light from beneath it. I was just going to step in, and say good night, when the light seemed to suddenly vanish. Then I concluded I had been mistaken, as I heard no sound inside, and I fancied the light must have been the reflection from an electric in the street."

"There is no electric lamp in the street that could shine in the windows of the judge's office," said Detective Jenkert, quietly.

"No?" questioned Dr. Parker, slightly surprised. "Well, I'm sure I saw a light. However, I may have been mistaken, but I am positive of what I saw next."

"What was it?" asked Jack, eagerly. "Did you see any one with a box——"

"No," spoke the little dentist, carefully uncrossing his legs, and then recrossing them again, "I saw no one with a box, but as I got to the foot of the stairway I met a man coming up."

"A man?" cried Detective Tyler. "Was it——"

"It wasn't Mr. Herkimer, if that's what you're going to ask," replied the dentist quickly. "The man was a stranger to me. At first I thought it was a patient looking for me, or, perhaps, the same person whose tooth I had just pulled, but, when I looked again, by the light of the lamp, at the foot of the stairs, I saw that it was a small man, with a small, very black moustache——"

"That's the man!" cried Nat Anderson, excitedly.

"What man?" asked both detectives quickly.

"The one I've been suspicious of all along," went on Nat, and he proceeded to explain the encounters of himself and Jack with the man, evidently a foreigner, first in the express office, and and again, in the ice-cream parlor, on which last occasion he had a girl with him.

"That proves nothing," was the opinion of Detective Tyler. "Go on, please, Dr. Parker. What did this man do?"

"Nothing," answered the dentist, while Nat felt a bit crestfallen. "He merely turned around, and walked away."

"Didn't he say anything?"

"Yes, he asked me if that was a doctor's office, as he said a friend of his was ill."

"What did you say?" inquired Judge Bennett.

"I told him I was a dentist. Doubtless he had mistaken my sign for that of a physician. That is all I know."

"But about the man!" exclaimed Mr. Jenkert. "What became of him?"

"Oh, he asked me to direct him to a physician, and I did so, telling him how to reach Dr. Marsden's office on the next street. Then I went on home. The man hurried off ahead of me."

In spite of a vigorous cross-questioning that was all the evidence that Dr. Parker could give, but it was valuable in a measure. It seemed to prove that Caleb Herkimer, or whoever the thief was, had been at work early in the judge's office. Also that Caleb might have had an accomplice, or that the strange man, whom Jack and Nat had seen, had in some way been mixed up in the affair. Yet the latter theory did not seem reasonable for the reason that the judge's safe, even with the time lock out of order, was one difficult to open unless it was forced.

And yet it was not forced. Whoever had removed from it the treasure box, the money and papers, had worked the combination. This pointed to Caleb Herkimer. No foreigner would have been able to do it, for, as the judge explained, once he had forgotten the combination, and it took an expert from the factory two days to open

his strong box, for the lawyer did not wish it taken apart.

"That seems to preclude the possibility of the foreigner whom you boys suspect having taken the treasure," said Detective Tyler. "It seems to centre down on Mr. Herkimer. We will at once begin to trace him. I'll wire to New York, and have all outgoing steamers watched, for doubtless he will flee to some foreign country."

"I guess that is the best plan," agreed Judge Bennett, with a sigh. "Poor Caleb, in spite of the fact that he has robbed me, and taken Jack's treasure box, I feel sorry for him. He is now a hunted man, with a price on his head, for I am going to offer a reward of a thousand dollars for his capture."

"And I'm sure dad will do the same," spoke Jack, eagerly. "I'll telegraph him——"

"There's time enough. He'll soon be home," said the lawyer. "Then you gentlemen," turning to the detectives, "haven't been able to pick up any clews here?"

"None worth speaking of," replied Mr. Tyler. "We have looked all about, and it is evident that whoever robbed you (and I am sure it was Herkimer) was in a hurry. This is shown by the manner in which your papers are scattered about. By the way, perhaps it would be possible to trace your

clerk if he attempts to make use of any of the documents he took from the safe and desk."

"Perhaps," admitted the lawyer. "I will give you a memorandum of them, and the names of the persons to whom they refer."

"That will do," agreed the officer. "Then I can keep in touch with the persons, and, if Herkimer makes any demands for money, or tries some form of blackmail, we'll have him."

While the judge was making out a list, and the detectives were jotting down some notes, Jack and Nat wandered about the apartment. Dr. Parker had gone back to his office.

The rooms of the lawyer were in curious contrast to their usual neat appearance, for what confusion had been caused by the thief, or thieves, had been added to by the judge in looking over his desk, and by the detectives. Papers and books were scattered all about.

"Well, it sure is tough luck," agreed Nat, as he and Jack stood at a window, gazing moodily down into the street. "I guess this will break up the yachting trip; eh?"

"I certainly won't feel like going away, until I get some trace of my box," said Jack.

"Sam and the fellows will be counting on us," went on Nat. "Perhaps we'd better notify them, for I'm not going unless you go."

"Nonsense! Of course you are. Don't let me

influence you. Perhaps, if I could get a clew——”

Jack paused suddenly. His eyes seemed riveted on something in one corner of the room. He stooped, and picked up a small object.

“Look at this!” he exclaimed to his chum.

“A woman’s hatpin!” cried Nat. “Rolling watermelons! Say, Jack, don’t you recognize it?”

“Recognize it? No. My acquaintance with ladies who wear expensive hatpins like this is very limited.”

The pin was of curious and beautiful workmanship, seemingly of silver and gold, cunningly welded together, and in the centre was some sort of a blood-red stone—perhaps a ruby.

“And you don’t remember that pin?” asked Nat, as he took it from Jack, and held it up.

“No. Do you?”

“What have you found?” asked Detective Tyler.

“A clew,” answered Nat, quietly.

“A clew? To what?”

“The robbery last night! See, this hatpin was one worn by the pretty woman—or girl—who was with the dark, foreign-looking man, whom we met in the ice-cream parlor. Don’t you remember, Jack? She looked at you in a way I’d not forget, if it had been me.”

“The girl with the foreigner!” exclaimed Mr. Tyler. “Then she——”

"She must have been here!" burst out Jack.
"Perhaps she—she——"

"Perhaps *she* took your treasure box," finished Nat. "It's a hard thing to say, Jack, for she was mighty pretty, but——" and he held up the jeweled pin.

It was a new clew, and was destined to prove a most valuable one.

CHAPTER XI

A CHANGE OF PLANS

JACK's discovery of the pin at once put a new face on the matter. The detectives were eagerly interested, and wanted to hear, over again, all that pertained to the mysterious stranger—the Spaniard—as the boys had begun to call him, for want of a better title.

"I wonder if Dr. Parker saw anything of the girl?" mused Nat. "Perhaps she was hiding around the corner, while the man was robbing the safe."

"Couldn't be," declared Jack. "Dr. Parker saw a light under the judge's door when he was passing it, and it was after that, that he met the man down at the front steps."

"Then the girl was up in the office, looting the safe, while the man kept watch, and made those inquiries about the doctor for his sick friend merely as a blind. The girl is the thief, Jack."

"Never!" exclaimed our hero, energetically. "She—she wasn't that kind. Besides, she never could have carried that heavy treasure box alone." He was thinking of the warm glance from the

girl's dark eyes, when he had stood near her in the ice-cream parlor.

"Well," remarked Detective Tyler, "we are getting along fairly well. This pin will prove a valuable clew, or I'm mistaken. It is of odd workmanship, and should be easy to trace. Is there a jeweler in town?"

Jack remembered the one whose window he had once seen a thief smash, as told in the first volume of this series, and the youth also recalled the puzzle over the two queer rings which formed such important evidence in bringing back his father from his exile in the west. He mentioned the name of this jeweler, and Detective Tyler at once volunteered to accompany the owner of the treasure box to the store.

"Yes, that pin is of foreign make," said the jeweler. "I should say it was Spanish or, perhaps, Mexican. The combination of gold and silver is not often seen. The stone, too, is peculiar. It is not a ruby, though it may be very valuable. I have not had much experience in stones."

"Could that pin have been made by some ancient Indian tribe—say one skilled in the jewelry art?" asked Jack. "Some tribe that was under Spanish influence years ago?"

"Perhaps. Why?"

"Then I'll tell you what I think," declared Jack,

excitedly, to the detective, as they left the jewelry store.

"What?"

"I believe that this pin, instead of falling out of the hat of the Spanish girl, came from my treasure box. Dad said the chest probably contained ancient jewelry, and this must be a part of it. Caleb Herkimer, or that Spaniard, opened my box in the office, and the pin fell out."

The detective shook his head.

"It's a pretty theory, but it won't hold water," he said. "In the first place, old Indian tribes, or, for that matter, the more recent Spaniards, had no uses for hatpins. They are of modern manufacture, as is evident by the steel point on this. Again, you say the box is very difficult to open. If your father, and his friends on the coast couldn't manage to solve the secret of the lock, it is hardly possible that a thief, in the middle of the night, would stop to do so."

"But that Spaniard—I mean the man—not the girl—may have known the secret of the lock, and it may not have taken him a second to open the box," insisted Jack. "Maybe they smashed it open."

Once more the detective shook his head.

"You forget that your friend, Nat, saw this hatpin in the hat of the girl in the ice-cream parlor," he said. "That was before the robbery."

Jack sighed.

"I—I guess she's guilty—or one of the guilty ones," he admitted.

Inquiries were made of the railroad officials regarding the leaving of two foreign persons from Denton the previous night or early the next morning. News of them was quickly secured. The man and girl had taken an early train for New York. Neither of them carried any luggage, beyond a small handbag which the girl had, nor did they send any trunks or valises by express, or as baggage. It was found that the two had stopped at the only hotel in Denton, that they had occupied separate rooms, and had passed as brother and sister. They had come without baggage, two days previous, had paid cash in advance, and had departed as they arrived. They had maintained silence while in town, and the only thing about them that was known was their names, which they had given as Maximina and Rodnez Manacca.

"Well, our inquiry will have to be along two lines," decided the detectives, as they took their departure. "We will have to work from the New York end, now, and try to trace these Spanish people, and also Caleb Herkimer. As soon as we have any news, Judge Bennett, we will let you know."

They left, and Jack, as far as his treasure box was concerned, was as badly off as before. He

returned home in a very despondent frame of mind, and broke the news to his aunts, who were properly horrified, and who wanted to do all sorts of impossible things.

"Jack!" exclaimed Aunt Angelina, with a fierceness that was in strange contrast to her name, "why don't you go to New York at once, and arrest these people?"

"I would, if I knew where to go," he answered, moodily.

"That Caleb Herkimer!" exclaimed Aunt Josephine. "I—I wish I had hold of him! I'd—I'd—pull his ears good, that's what I'd do!"

Jack laughed at her fierce manner, and her contrastingly gentle mode of punishment.

"Oh, but Jack!" exclaimed Aunt Mary, "here's a telegram for you—two of them in fact. They came a little while ago, and scared us greatly."

Jack ripped open the envelopes.

"Dad'll be here to-night," he announced, as he perused the words quickly. Then he read the other message.

"It's from Sam Chalmers," he stated. "He's made all the arrangements for the cruise, and wants me to communicate with Captain Reeger. Sam and Bony will be here to-morrow, ready to go on to New York. The other fellows couldn't go. Well, I'm not going either, though I'll arrange about Captain Reeger for them.

"Not going!" exclaimed Aunt Mary, for the aunts had been told of Jack's proposed cruise.

"No; not until I get some trace of my treasure box."

A little later Jack went to tell Nat Anderson the news, and nothing his friend could say, from "slabsided sauerkraut" to "mystifying mastodons!" induced our hero to change his mind. He wanted to get on the track of the thief or thieves who had stolen his box, and so would abandon the prospective cruise.

Mr. Ranger arrived in Denton that evening, and was much surprised, and not a little chagrined, to hear of the loss of the box. He went into detail about how he had come to get possession of the chest, though he was not able to throw any more light on the contents. Nor was he able to suggest, after hearing the story of the theft, and the clues, who might have taken it—whether Caleb Herkimer, or the Spaniard.

"But there's no need of you giving up your yachting cruise on this account," said Mr. Ranger to his son. "I'll look for the box for you, Jack."

"No, thank you, dad, I want to do it myself," and Jack's mind seemed made up. Nor could the arrival of Sam Chalmers and Bony Balmore effect any change. They reached Denton two days after Mr. Ranger, having been delayed. They were full of spirits, and told great stories of the closing

of Washington Hall, which were further supplemented by Budge Rankin, whose testimony, however, was somewhat marred by his gum-chewing habit.

"Alltothemustard!" was how he described the final scenes, at which Jack and Nat were not present.

"But how about this cruise business?" began Sam. "It's too bad, Jack, that you're going to back out. It'll be no fun, if you and Nat don't go. I guess we all may as well give it up; and after our great preparation, too! Why, I've had enough grub sent aboard the *Sea Bird* to last for a voyage to the North Pole. My uncle's law firm hired a cook, and two machinists for us. All we have to do is to get Captain Reeger, and start off."

"Well, I've written to Captain Reeger for you," said Jack, but it was with none of his usual enthusiasm. "He'll go all right."

"But we want *you*!" insisted Bony, in his earnestness cracking his knuckles one after the other.

"Can't go," declared Jack, positively. "I'm going to be busy, just as soon as I hear from those detectives. Nat ought to go with you fellows, though, and maybe I'll join you later. But now——"

"Say," remarked Budge Rankin, who just then strolled past where Jack and his chums were talk-

ing, on the street corner, not far from Jack's home, "say, Jack, yourauntswantchu?"

"My aunts want me?" repeated Jack, after a pause necessary to translate Budge's gum-chewing language into English.

"Yep. 'StelephonemessageIthink."

"Telephone message; eh? Wait a minute, fellows, and I'll be right back," and Jack set off on a run toward the house, while his chums discussed his refusal to go with them. Bony and Sam were trying to persuade Nat to think better of his resolution to stick by Jack, and to accompany them, when Jack came back, still on the run.

"Judge Bennett wants to see me," he explained, pantingly. "I guess it's something about my treasure box! Come on down to his office."

Jack found the lawyer bending over a pile of papers on his desk, for he had not yet secured another clerk, and his documents were still in confusion.

"Ah, Jack," began the lawyer. "I have some news for you—not very good, though. I'm afraid you have seen the last of your treasure box, and I of my five thousand dollars—to say nothing of my papers."

"Why so?" asked Jack, as he quickly introduced Sam and Bony.

"I have just received word from Detective Tyler, who went to New York," continued the

former jurist. "He says that he has been able to trace Caleb Herkimer, but that he has no clew to the Spanish man or girl."

"Where is Caleb?" asked Jack, eagerly. "I'm sure he has my box."

"I am beginning to believe so myself," resumed the judge. "Well, the detective has learned that Caleb Herkimer sailed for Porto Rico three days ago, taking a very heavy trunk with him."

"Porto Rico!" gasped Jack. "Away down there?"

"Oh, it's not such a great distance," went on Mr. Bennett, "but with the start he has, and knowing something of the conditions in Porto Rico, I'm afraid you've seen the last of him, and your box. I am thinking of sending the detective down there, but it is an almost hopeless chase."

There was silence in the office for a few seconds. No one knew what to say. At last Sam Chalmers spoke.

"Jack," he began, "do you suppose Captain Reeger would know how to sail for Porto Rico?"

"I should think so. But why?"

"I'll tell you," resumed Sam, with energy, as he got up from his chair. "If he'll consent to pilot the *Sea Bird* there, we'll go in her, and have a chase after this Caleb Herkimer and your treasure box! We might just as well cruise down there as along the New England coast. I wasn't much

stuck on that plan, anyhow. Now we'll change it! I'm sure my uncle will consent. This is what we'll do. We'll go in Uncle Bill's yacht to Porto Rico, or any other old place that this treasure-box thief flees to! Will you come, Jack? You and Nat?"

"Will I?" cried Jack. "I guess I will! That's the stuff! Now we have a chance to get Mr. Herkimer. I never thought of this. Can the motor-yacht go so far, Sam?"

"Sure, and farther. We'll get Mr. Caleb Herkimer and the treasure box, too, if he still has it!"

"Or, the pretty Spanish girl—if she has it," said Nat,—and Jack glared at his chum.

CHAPTER XII

ALL ABOARD!

NAT ANDERSON had to dodge behind a chair, to escape the leap which Jack made at him, after the somewhat sneering remark about the girl.

"Hyperdermic hoptoads!" exclaimed Nat, when our hero's first rush was over, harmlessly, as it transpired, "What's the matter, Jack?"

"You know what's the matter, well enough. What do you want to go making cracks like that for?"

"Like what?"

"Saying that Miss Manacca is a thief."

"Miss Manacca!" cried Sam, who had heard the story, as had Bony. "He's got her name down all right, fellows."

"He sure has," agreed Bony. "Oh, wait until I write to Miss Mabel Pierce, out west."

"Say, fellows, cut it out," begged Jack, earnestly. "It's a pity I wouldn't know her name, when it was on the hotel register. But that's got nothing to do with it. It's not right to say she stole the treasure box."

"You as good as admitted it yourself," said

Nat, indignantly. "If she didn't take it, that Spanish fellow with her *did*."

"Maybe not," went on Jack, not caring to answer his chum's first accusation. "That was before we had heard from the detectives in New York. It's practically certain, now, that Caleb Herkimer has my treasure box, and we're going after him."

"That's the way to talk!" cried Judge Bennett, "and, while you're about it, Jack, get back my money and papers."

"Sure, we will," promised Sam. "Now, let's get busy, fellows. We ought to be in New York now."

"Where's the *Sea Bird*?" asked Nat.

"Waiting for us in the Erie Basin. She's all stocked up by this time, and all we want to do is to get aboard, arrange to have Captain Reeger meet us, and sail. It's up to you, Jack."

"All right. I'll do my part."

Once Jack did get started there was no stopping him. He hurried home, told his father and aunts of the change in plans, and sent a message to Captain Reeger. Then he began to pack, an example followed by Nat.

Bony and Sam were to remain as guests of Jack in the two or three days that would elapse before they set sail. In the meanwhile a message was

received from Captain Reeger, saying that he would meet the boys in New York.

Jack's aunts made quite a fuss about him going on the cruise, particularly when the object was the capture of the thief, but Mr. Ranger, after carefully considering it, decided in his son's favor.

"It will do Jack good," he declared. "He's got to shift for himself, sooner or later; and, besides, I want that treasure box back. There may be nothing in it, and, again, there may be considerable. But I want to see the inside of it. Go ahead, Jack, and bring it back with you."

In the interval of getting ready for the trip to Porto Rico, another message was received from Detective Tyler, who was still in New York. It confirmed the news that Caleb Herkimer had fled to the former Spanish island possession, and stated that there was little chance of having him apprehended there, on account of the peculiar police conditions then existing in the place. Also, the officer sent word, it was doubtful if a warrant could be obtained merely on such suspicion as was entertained by Jack and Judge Bennett. It would be best for Jack and his friends to proceed directly to San Juan, and from that Porto Rican port start their search and inquiry. The detective promised to meet the boys in New York.

The lads started for the metropolis three days later.

Almost at the last minute Jack proposed taking Budge Rankin along. He had a great liking for the odd chap, as had his chums, in fact, and Jack thought that the youth, who was strong and a willing worker, would prove valuable on the voyage. He was a fairly good cook, and, though Sam's uncle had recommended a colored man to preside over the galley, still Budge might come in handy. As for Budge himself, when the proposition was made to him, he hardly stopped chewing gum long enough to say:

"Sure I'll go."

"All right. Pack up," ordered Jack, and Budge did so, with as much unconcern as if some one had asked him to go to the post-office.

"This," observed Bony Balmore, as he sat in the train, speeding to the metropolis, cracking his knuckles to keep time with the clattering of the car wheels over the rail joints, "this is going to be great, I think! It will be a heap sight more fun than merely sailing along the New England coast."

"Sure," agreed Sam. "And if we can only catch that Herkimer——"

"Or the pretty Spanish girl," interrupted Nat.

"Drop that!" commanded Jack, with a dangerous look in his eyes.

"Well, say, if she didn't have anything to do with taking the treasure box, how do you account

for her hatpin being found in the judge's office?" asked Nat.

"She may have called to see the judge on business, and dropped it," suggested Jack.

"Rats!" ejaculated Nat. "You've got to think up a better reason than that, old man."

Jack thought so himself, but said nothing. Truth to tell, he was uncomfortable about that bit of evidence against the pretty, dark-eyed girl. He had the hatpin in his possession, and he was wondering what to do with it. He did not believe that the fair owner of it had taken his box. He felt that the Spanish-looking man might be a suspicious character, but Jack had set down Caleb Herkimer as the thief of the treasure chest, and nothing Nat could say would induce him to believe Miss Manacca guilty—that is, not then. Later—but I will get to that presently.

The boys arrived at the Grand Central station in New York about an hour behind time, because of a freight wreck up near Poughkeepsie. But they did not mind that, and went at once to the hotel which Sam's uncle had recommended. Leaving their baggage there, they hired a taxicab and drove about, seeing the sights until time for supper, as they had decided not to visit the Erie Basin, to inspect the yacht, until the following day.

New York was no great novelty to the other lads, but it was to Budge. Still, he did not betray

his wonder, but, like an Indian, remained silent. But, when he was about to sit down to the table with the others (for, though he was in the nature of an employee, there were no false social distinctions), the odd lad remarked, all in a breath:

"Thizabusierplace'nDenton."

"A busier place than Denton!" exclaimed Jack. "I should say so!"

"Well, I should crack a watermelon," observed Nat, and the others laughed.

That evening Captain Reeger, in response to a message sent to his hotel, called on the boys.

"How's the *Sea Bird*?" was Sam's first question.

"Fine," was the equally enthusiastic response of the sailor.

"And ready to make a long chase?" inquired Jack.

"Sure!"

"Then we sail to-morrow?" asked Bony, cracking his finger joints in rapid succession, to the no small wonder of Captain Reeger.

"Yes, if you're ready. But I believe Detective Tyler wants to see you. I have met him since I have been in New York, and he said he had further news for you."

"What sort of news?" asked Jack.

"I don't know exactly, but he mentioned another

yacht having set sail for Porto Rico recently, with a Spaniard on board, who acted suspiciously."

"A Spaniard? Was there a—a girl with him?" demanded Jack.

"I couldn't say," answered Captain Reeger. "Mr. Tyler said he'd try and call this evening."

Then followed an exchange of news between the captain on one side and the boys on the other. Sam wanted to hear all about the yacht, as did his chums, and the captain was able to satisfy them. The *Sea Bird* was all ready to start, he stated, as she was all provisioned, the crew and cook were aboard, and all that was lacking was the presence of the schoolboy yachtsmen.

"But about Detective Tyler," said Jack. "We must hear what he says. Perhaps I'd better go out, and see if I can find him. I have his address."

At that moment there came a knock on the door of the private parlor which was part of the suite of apartments hired by the boys. A bell-boy entered with a card.

"Detective Tyler's here now," exclaimed Jack. "Bring him right up," he added to the much-buttoned messenger. "What's this about another yacht?" asked Jack, when the officer entered.

"I learned that a large motor yacht, named the *Dolphin*, sailed for San Juan yesterday," said Mr. Tyler. "On board of her, in addition to

others, was a Spaniard who went by the name of Manacca!"

"Manacca!" cried Jack. "That's the one——"

"Yes, the one who, with a Spanish girl, was in Denton the night of the robbery," interrupted the officer. "I have satisfied myself on that point. Whether he took your box, and the papers and money from the judge, is another matter. But he sailed on the *Dolphin*."

"Was—was—his—was there a girl with him?" stammered Jack.

"No," answered the detective. "He had some friends on board, however. They were Jonas Lavine and Jerry Chowden, and——"

"Jonas Lavine and Jerry Chowden!" cried Jack, and his words were echoed by Nat, and his other chums. If a bombshell had been thrown into the hotel parlor at that moment, it could not have created more dismay. Jack even forgot to be glad that the girl with the black eyes was not on the *Dolphin*.

"Jonas Lavine and Jerry Chowden?" repeated Mr. Tyler questioningly. "Why, is there anything strange in that? I don't see——"

"That's because you don't know them," interrupted Nat. "Slabsided sauerkraut! if there are two worse characters than Lavine and Jerry Chowden I want to know it," and between them, Jack and Nat managed to tell the officer of the

acts of the bully, Chowden, while he was at Washington Hall, and also how he had aided Lavine in kidnapping Jack and Nat aboard the *Polly Ann*, as related in the volume entitled, "Jack Ranger's Ocean Cruise."

Captain Reeger, too, was surprised to learn of the near presence of his old enemy, Lavine. The man, it developed, had by some underhanded work, managed to get out of jail.

"If Lavine and Chowden are in Porto Rico when we get there, we'll have trouble," predicted Nat.

"Well, we'll be ready for them," declared Jack, grimly. "But why did they sail with this Spaniard, Manacca; and what is his object?" Jack asked the detective. This was more than the officer could answer, though he had several theories, as did Jack and his chums.

But talking could not fathom the mystery, and so it was decided to let it drop for the time being, and devote all their energies to the capture of Caleb Herkimer. The detective and Captain Reeger then took their departure, promising to meet the boys at the anchorage of the *Sea Bird* in Erie Basin next day.

Swinging at her cables in the harbor devoted to vessels of many kinds, the *Sea Bird* was a beautiful sight when the boys were rowed out to her early the next morning. She was a larger boat

than the boys had expected to see. Trim as a racer, yet with room enough to make her passengers comfortable, the craft of Sam's uncle, so opportunely loaned for the occasion, was a delight to the hearts of the school boys. They scrambled up the accommodation ladder that hung over her side, with a broad landing stage for boats, and soon stood on deck. Forward were two men, and a big colored fellow, the personification of health and good nature. All three saluted the boys, and Captain Reeger.

"Is he the cook?" asked Jack, pointing at the colored man.

"Dat's who I is, sah," was the grinning answer. "Was dere anyt'ing special dat yo'all would like fo' dinnah?"

"Fried chicken!" cried Sam.

"Watermelon on ice!" ordered Nat.

"Corn muffins," came from Jack.

"Clam chowder," was Bony's preference.

"What's yours, Budge?" asked Jack.

"Crackers'n'milk," was the calm answer. "'Fraid I'll be seasick," added Budge, who, wonderful to relate, was not chewing any gum.

"Well, Skeleton, give 'em what they want," ordered Sam, who, by virtue of his role as host, had been nominated as leader.

"Skeleton?" questioned Jack.

"Yes, I call him that because he's so fat," ex-

plained Sam, as the colored man, with a grin on his glistening face, disappeared in his galley. "His right name is George Washington Andrew Jackson Somethingorother, but Uncle Bill said to call him Skeleton. You see, he's been on voyages with my uncle before, so it's all right."

The boys went over the yacht. She was most completely fitted up. There was a powerful gasoline engine forward, capable of driving the boat at good speed, and the storage tanks would enable her to travel for a long distance without stopping for a new supply of gasoline. The quarters of the crew were forward, back of the engine compartment. Next came a saloon, or living room, where the boys could spend their time when it was too rough to be on deck.

There was a small dining saloon back of that, and then came several staterooms, two bathrooms and storage lockers. The boat was arranged for comfort on a long cruise, and nothing was spared to make her a safe and fine home on the water. Three boats were carried, a small dinghy for the crew, a four-oared gig for the captain and his guests, and a little motor launch, that swung at davits over the starboard side, ready to be lowered to the water in case a quick trip to shore was desired, and it was not thought best to dock the *Sea Bird*.

On deck there were wicker chairs under an awn-

ing, well aft, and there was a promenade deck, over the raised trunk cabin, while what corresponded to the bridge was in front of the forward skylights of this same cabin. There, on a cushioned seat, the captain and his friends could lounge, while the commander steered the boat by means of a wheel, somewhat like one on an automobile, save for the rake. Near the wheel was the engine room telegraph apparatus, for signaling for different speeds, also a glass-covered chart table. In case of stormy weather the boat could be steered from inside the main saloon, or cabin.

"Oh, this will be great!" cried Bony, as he tried one easy chair after another. "Simply great!"

"That's what," agreed Jack. "Well, we ought to sail pretty soon."

"We will," promised Captain Reeger. "I was waiting for Detective Tyler. He said he would be on shore at eleven o'clock to give you boys any possible last word."

"Then we'd better go ashore and meet him," proposed Sam, "for it's nearly eleven now."

"I'll go," volunteered Jack. "The message will be for me, anyhow, and you fellows can stay here and get things in shape."

"Yes, ship-shape," added Captain Reeger. "I'll need to fix up some papers, and see to several things, so I guess I'll not go ashore again. I

have the clearance documents, clean bill of health, and all that."

"I'll have Hanson, he's the assistant engineer, row you ashore, and meet Tyler," said Sam, and he gave the necessary order to the man, who, saluting, lowered the dinghy to the water, and invited Jack to get in.

The row to the edge of the dock basin was short, and Jack found the detective waiting for him. Mr. Tyler had been unable to learn any further details concerning either Caleb Herkimer, or Lavine, Chowden and the mysterious Spaniard.

"Or Miss—I mean the Spanish girl, either?" asked Jack, and his heart was strangely beating.

"No, she seems to have disappeared," was the answer. "Well, I hope you boys have a good time on your outing," and the officer turned away. "I hope you get back your treasure box," he cried to Jack, waving his hand.

Jack was about to give an order for the assistant engineer to row him back to the *Sea Bird* when our hero saw a girl running down toward the landing float from which he was about to push off. Following her was an elderly negro woman, carrying two valises, and a number of boxes.

"Oh!" cried the girl, breathlessly, as she fairly flew down upon the float, near Jack, "I hope I'm in time."

At the sound of her voice Jack looked up. His heart almost ceased beating, as he recognized the pretty Spanish girl—she who, he believed, owned the hatpin he was carrying about with him; the girl who had helped to take the treasure box.

The girl was staring at him. Beneath her olive tinted skin a deep red surged.

"Is—do you know—has the *Dolphin* sailed yet, can you tell me?" she asked.

"The *Dolphin* sailed several days ago," replied Jack, quietly, and, at his words the girl threw up her hands, and seemed greatly alarmed.

"Don't tell me that!" she pleaded. "It was not to sail until to-day! I was to go aboard her. I and my old nurse. Don't tell me she has sailed without us!"

"I'm afraid it's true, if you are referring to the motor yacht *Dolphin*, bound for San Juan, or some port in Porto Rico," added Jack.

"That's the one! That's where I'm bound! Oh, and now I'm too late! What shall I do? What shall I do?" and, to Jack's distress, the girl burst into tears.

From the deck of the *Sea Bird* came a hail through a megaphone.

"Hello, Jack! All aboard! Hurry back, the tide's on the turn, and Captain Reeger wants to sail! All aboard, Jack!"

Jack looked at the weeping girl, and waited.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK'S DILEMMA

MANY thoughts surged through the mind of Jack Ranger as he sat there in the little boat, listening to the call of his chums from the deck of the *Sea Bird*, and hearing the sobbing of the beautiful girl, about whom there seemed to be such a mystery. What was he to do?

"Do you want to go to Porto Rico, Miss—er——" began Jack.

"Oh, so much!" she exclaimed, looking at him through tear-dimmed eyes. "But I—I seem to know you. I have seen you—Oh, where was it? I am so distressed I can't remember!"

"It was in Denton, where I live," explained Jack, simply. "I saw you there in an ice-cream parlor, with—with your—brother, Miss——" he paused, hoping she would tell her name.

"Oh, that was it!" she cried, almost like a child. "But why are you here? Oh, I forgot, you don't know me, I am——"

"Miss Manacca," interrupted Jack.

"Why, how do you know?" She was plainly surprised.

"You registered at the Denton hotel."

"Oh, yes, I forgot, Manacca—" she repeated the name as if it was rather an unfamiliar one. "My brother and I—Oh, yes, but now—Oh, he has sailed without me!" and she began weeping again. "I must have read the date wrong in his letter. I thought he said he was to sail to-day. Now he is gone. Oh, what shall I do?" and she threw her arms around the motherly-looking colored woman, who, by this time, after a panting and labored effort, had reached the float.

"Oh, Musa, Musa!" cried the girl, "he has gone and left us—left us all alone in this big city! What shall we do? What shall we do?"

The colored woman, whose name was evidently Musa, clasped her fair charge in her ample arms, and murmured something in Spanish. Jack felt embarrassed.

"Is there no other way you can get to Porto Rico?" he asked. "I think there are other vessels sailing there——"

"Yes, for those who have money to pay their passage. But I have not. I had some money, but I was robbed of it on my way to New York, after having visited friends. "Oh, it was terrible of my brother to sail without me! He might have known I would come if he had only waited."

"Perhaps he thought you had gone on ahead," ventured Jack, "or that, when you did not meet him, that you would follow later," but he did not believe it. There seemed to be more of the mystery here, and the presence, on the *Dolphin*, of Lavine and Chowden only added to it.

"He *might* have thought that," said Miss Manacca, hopefully, "for he knew that I had funds of my own—that is, I did have them," she added ruefully. "My brother and I live in the city of Ponce, in Porto Rico," she went on. "We came to the United States on—well, on business—and when about to depart for home, my brother arranged with some new friends he met to take him back. He wrote me about them, and said I was to accompany him. But I was delayed, paying a visit to some friends after we left Denton, and I agreed to meet my brother in New York, and go with him on the *Dolphin*. But on the way here my pocket was picked by a thief, and all but a few dollars was taken. The police could not aid me. I hurried on, thinking to meet my brother here, but he has gone—gone and left me. I made a mistake in the date. I have no money, and I do not know a soul in that whole, big city," and she waved a hand helplessly toward New York. "I am alone—friendless—forsaken, save for my old nurse, Musa. Oh, Musa! Musa! What shall we do? What can we do?" and,

once more, she sobbed on the ample shoulders of the colored woman.

Our hero was very much discomfited. He had had very little experience with pretty girls in tears.

"If you want—and really have to get to Porto Rico——" began Jack.

"All aboard! Say, are you going to stay chinning there all day?" yelled Sam, through the megaphone. "Come aboard, Jack! We want to sail."

Jack looked at the beautiful girl in distress.

"Must you get to Porto Rico—soon?" he inquired.

"Yes,—oh, yes! But why do you ask? Is there a—a way?"

"Some friends and myself are about to sail in a private yacht," explained Jack. "There's plenty of room, but no other ladies are aboard. Still, with your nurse as your companion——"

"Oh, do you mean it? Is there really a chance for me to sail for Ponce?" she cried. "Can we go now—get in the boat with you?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "I think it will hold us all and your luggage. But we are bound for San Juan—not Ponce."

"That is no matter. Ponce is only on the other side of the island, and once in dear Porto Rico

I can drive across. There is a fine road. Have you ever been in Porto Rico?"

"Never," confessed Jack. "I am going there now to——"

He stopped suddenly. He had felt, in the pocket of his coat (its steel point well protected), the jeweled hatpin.

"Oh, you will find Porto Rico most delightful," went on the girl. "I shall be most happy to show you about—I and my brother."

Jack could not repress a grim smile. Considering that he was going to the island to cause the arrest of Caleb Herkimer, and might probably have to make quite a chase after the suspect, Jack felt that he would have little time to be shown about by the pretty Spanish girl. Still, he had hopes.

"Are you coming, Jack Ranger?" demanded Bony's voice through the megaphone. "We're going to sail without you."

"Ranger? Is that your name?" asked the girl, as she got into the boat, while Musa, the nurse, piled in the luggage.

"Yes," answered Jack.

"It's rather odd," commented the girl. "I have been to American schools, and Ranger means a sort of traveler—doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Are you a traveler?"

"Well, I've been about considerable," admitted our hero. "But if you'll sit a little to the left, the boat will trim better, Miss Manacca. We have rather a heavy load," for the colored nurse with the luggage was in now.

"Oh, is there any danger; do you think? I am so timid on the water, yet I love it. I hope your yacht is seaworthy."

"I think you will find her so."

Once more came the hail through the megaphone, and, seeing that his two unexpected passengers were safely aboard, Jack motioned for Hanson to row back.

As the dinghy approached the side of the *Sea Bird*, Jack saw a row of curious faces peering down at him.

"Oh, what a lovely boat!" exclaimed Miss Manacca, getting a good view of the yacht.

"Yes, it belongs to an uncle of a chum of mine," explained Jack. At the same moment he heard the aforesaid chum remark to Bony and Nat:

"For cats' sake, look what Jack has picked up! Two women folks—and—by the great horn spoon! If one of 'em isn't colored!"

"And the other—the other—" gasped Nat, as he caught a glimpse of Miss Manacca, "the other is the one——"

"Bang!" Jack had taken up a spare oar, and

dropped it to the bottom of the dinghy with a crash.

"By Jove! I hope she didn't hear that!" thought Jack, turning around, and waving at his chums, in the vain hope of making them keep quiet. "I've got to get on deck first, and tip 'em off to keep mum," he reasoned further. "Say, but I guess I'm in a dilemma, all right. If she ever suspects that we suspect or—rather, if she suspects that Nat, and some of the others think she's the thief of my treasure box—there'll be a big row sure! I don't believe she knows anything about it. Her brother, either."

Once more Jack felt the hatpin in his pocket. How could he explain that?

Nearer and nearer the dinghy approached the accommodation ladder of the motor yacht. The faces of Jack's chums showed more and more astonishment.

"Wait just a moment, and I'll go up on deck, and arrange to have your baggage hoisted up, and also help you," Jack said to Miss Manacca, but his real object was to get a moment's headway, to warn his chums to keep silent. Our hero wondered how they would take it, and how Sam would feel at having two unexpected women passengers on his uncle's craft. But Jack was accustomed to carrying matters with a high hand. He knew he could manage Sam.

He leaped upon the deck. His chums crowded around him.

"For the love of tripe, Jack——" began Nat.

"Stow your talk!" commanded Jack quickly. "Fellows, we're going to solve a first-class mystery. Now, keep mum, every one of you. Below, waiting to make the voyage to Porto Rico with us, is the Spanish girl, and her nurse. Sam, go down and fix up the best cabin for Miss Manacca, and one next to it for her nurse. They're going with us. Here, the rest of you help 'em up, and hoist their baggage."

CHAPTER XIV

SAVED FROM THE SEA

JACK RANGER gave his chums little chance for reflection. He wanted to get Miss Manacca, and her attendant in their cabins, and then he would explain. His method proved effective.

"Well, you are a cool one," murmured Sam. "The idea——"

"Stow it, and get them and their luggage up here," commanded Jack. "I'll talk afterward. It was the only thing I could do. I couldn't leave her alone—without a cent—in New York."

"No—especially as she's such a pretty girl, and she may know something about your treasure——" began Nat.

"Cut it out!" cried Jack.

Two minutes later a rather timid young woman was shaking hands with Captain Reeger, while Jack explained the situation to the commander.

"And will you really take me to Porto Rico?" she asked, with a trace of tears in her eyes as she gazed around on the circle of boys.

"Of course we will!" exclaimed Captain Ree-

ger, heartily. "That is, of course—I'm not the owner, but I imagine he——"

"My uncle won't care," interrupted Sam, pleasantly, "he said I could do as I liked with the yacht, short of wrecking it, and you—you're as welcome as the flowers in May."

"Oh, what a pretty way of putting it!" exclaimed Miss Manacca. "And they say Americans pay no compliments!"

"He couldn't help himself," declared Jack, giving Sam a sly nudge in the ribs.

"Your stateroom is all ready," said Nat, who had gone below to help Skeleton get some of the boys' traps out of the room Jack had picked out as his own. Perhaps Nat considered it retributive justice to depose Jack. But our hero did not mind in the least.

The girl and her nurse were shown below, and their luggage piled in their adjoining staterooms. Then, when they were safely out of earshot, Sam turned to Jack, and demanded an explanation. He and the others got it in detail.

"Of course, I suppose it was rather a risky thing to do—inviting her on board without speaking to you fellows first," declared Jack, "but what was I to do? I couldn't leave her there!"

"Of course not—not after a couple of glances from her very effective eyes," mocked Nat. "Oh, wait until I write to Mabel!"

"Cut it out!" cried Jack, half angrily.

"It was the only thing to do," decided Sam. "Of course we'll take her to Porto Rico with us. It's all right. We have plenty of room, and enough to eat. Only——"

He paused, rather awkwardly.

"Well?" asked Jack.

"You know she is suspected of——"

"Not a bit of it!" cried Jack. "Caleb Herkimer has my treasure box, and I'll get it away from him!"

"But—her hatpin?" queried Nat.

"Forget it," advised Jack. "That will be explained—in due time."

"Are you going to ask her about it?" inquired Bony.

"I will—when I get ready," answered Jack, and he felt in his pocket to see if he still had the pin safe. It pressed hard against his sides. Truth to tell, it lay also rather heavily on his heart. What was the meaning of it being found in the office where the safe had been looted?

"Well, we must get under way," said Captain Reeger, briskly, coming up to the boys. "Are you all ready?"

"I guess so," answered Sam, not very seaman-like, but to the purpose.

"Then we'll weigh anchor, and drop down," went on the captain, and a few moments later the

winch was bringing in the anchor chain. Slowly the *Sea Bird* swung around. Standing at the bridge, Captain Reeger gave the signal for half speed ahead.

"We're off!" cried Sam, as the yacht began to gather headway.

"Ho! for Porto Rico!" cried Jack.

"And your treasure box!" added Nat.

"Keep quiet!" exclaimed Jack, and not a moment too soon for, an instant later, Miss Manacca appeared on deck, in a trim yachting suit, looking most charming.

"Oh, we have really started!" she cried. "How lovely! Soon I will be in dear old Ponce again! Oh, whatever would I have done had it not been for you, Mr. Ranger, and for your—your chuins—what a funny word," and she laughed, a little silvery ripple. But, though she looked at all the lads, it was on Jack's face that her bright eyes rested longest. "Did I hear you cry 'Ho! for Porto Rico?'" she asked.

"Yes," replied Jack, hoping she had not overheard Nat's remark. But her next question alarmed him.

"And why are you going? Is it that you hope for pleasure there; or, as I overheard some one say, are you going to seek a treasure?" Jack's heart nearly stopped beating. But he was reassured a moment later, for the girl went on. "Oh,

you Americans! Always hoping for riches. But Porto Rico has none to give, save to those who work hard for them. We raise tobacco, sugar and some cattle on my island. But gold——” she shrugged her shoulders. “There is no treasure there, Mr. Ranger.”

“Perhaps not,” and there was relief on Jack’s face. “But tell me more of the island,” and the girl swung into a description of the place, interesting alike to Jack, and his comrades who gathered around.

Meanwhile the *Sea Bird* swung out of the anchorage and was soon “footing” it down the harbor, where were many crafts of many kinds. Out through the Narrows she went, her passengers taking in the sights and the forts on either side of the harbor; out past the shallow waters where clammers and lobster fishermen were busy, down past Atlantic Highlands in the distance, making the turn at Sandy Hook, where a glimpse could be had of the wonderful coast defenses there, and then straight on out to sea, and down the coast toward the goal of the voyage.

“Oh, isn’t it delightful—wonderful! Almost as fine as Porto Rico!” exclaimed Miss Manacca, as she sat in a wicker chair under the after-awning, with the boys around her. “New York—in fact all of America—is a wonderful place, but it is not Ponce! Ah, when shall I see it again?”

"What brought you and your brother to New York—and Denton?" asked Jack.

"Oh, it was a mere accident that took us to your town—a most fortunate accident I am inclined to think," and the girl smiled frankly, showing two rows of white, even teeth. "I may as well tell you part of my story," she went on. "My brother and I are the only survivors of an old Spanish family. We are—very poor," and she laughed as she said it, so that Jack thought being poor was the most delightful thing in the world. "But my brother is always saying that we shall be rich some day."

"How?" asked Nat.

"Through our inheritance. It seems that there is a large sum of money due us, but we cannot get it—at least until very recently it seemed that we never would. But now——"

She paused, and gazed off to sea.

"Now," prompted Jack.

"Well, my brother is now sure that we will get it. In fact, he almost has possession of it—I hope. He was to get it in New York, and we were to take it back to Porto Rico with us. But by my mistake in the date I missed him. I hope—I trust—he has our inheritance safe, now. He has been seeking it for many years."

"And did that take him to Denton?" asked Jack, a curious suspicion taking possession of him.

"Well, not exactly," answered the girl. "We went to Denton to see a man who, my brother thought, could assist us in some manner."

"And did he?" Jack was bending eagerly forward.

"Yes, my brother and I saw him together, and—and—he really promised to get our inheritance for us. In fact he had it in his possession and was to give it to my brother in New York, and I believe he did. Otherwise my brother would not have sailed. Perhaps Rodnez was so excited over his good fortune, that he forgot about me. Rodnez is my brother," she explained. "Yes, that must have been it, but I do not regret so much having been left, since I have found so—many good friends," she finished with a laugh, and a look at all the boys.

Jack said nothing, and, a minute later, Skeleton announced dinner.

After the meal, life aboard the *Sea Bird* seemed to get into its regular groove. Matters regarding the management of the yacht were settled, staterooms were properly arranged (Jack taking a new one), the two machinists were divided into two shifts to run the motor, and Captain Reeger began making out his log.

The boys were to do their share of navigating in fair weather, for Jack and Nat had some skill in this direction. Budge elected to help, both in

the cooking and machinery departments, and would make himself generally useful. As for Musa, the colored attendant and former nurse of Miss Manacca, who explained that the aged woman had been in the family for two generations, she stayed below most of the time. Miss Manacca said that her nurse did not like the water.

"But as for me!" exclaimed the girl, "I just love it!" and, as she stood on the deck, with her hair blowing in the wind, and her eyes sparkling, one could well believe her.

In the well-lighted cabin that night they sat and talked, the Spanish girl proving herself a good entertainer, when she brought out her guitar, and played bewitching music, and sang. Captain Reeger made no preparations for retiring when the others proposed seeking their staterooms, though he had arranged with Jensen, the chief machinist, to take a trick at the wheel; for the motor, once it was running well, could get along with very little attention, or such as could be given by Budge Rankin, who, with a wad of gum in his mouth, had installed himself in the quarters with the small crew.

"Why don't you turn in?" asked Jack, when it was nearing midnight.

"Well," remarked the captain, soberly. "I don't like the looks of the weather. I didn't want

to say anything while Miss Manacca was present, but I'm afraid we're in for a storm.

His words were verified, when, after a night of pitching and tossing, for the sea was quite rough, the treasure-seekers arose, and saw a dull, leaden sky overhead, with inky clouds tearing along, while an occasional dash of rain gave promise of more unpleasantness.

The *Sea Bird* was a steady boat for her size, but this was of little avail in the ever-increasing roughness of the sea; though the only ill person aboard was the colored woman, and she stretched out in her berth and moaned. As for Miss Manacca, she insisted on remaining on deck, though Captain Reeger warned her that she had better go below.

"Oh, I can't!" she objected, with a pretty pout. "I just love a storm! It thrills me! I am afraid of the sea, but I love it, and I'm not afraid in this boat, and—with you, Captain Reeger!" and she smiled brightly.

"Thank you," he said, as he consulted the chart under a glass near the steering wheel, "but I'm afraid that wouldn't save you if a heavy sea came aboard, for we're getting into a nasty gale now, and it will soon be worse."

The wind was increasing, though just then the rain was not much more than a "Scotch mist." Attired in a raincoat, and without a hat, the girl

paced the deck. Jack and Nat were with her, watching the increasing seas and wondering what sort of a heavy-weather craft the yacht would prove herself. Bony began to feel a little squeamish, and had gone to his stateroom, while Sam, who was as "tough as nails," as he expressed it, was taking lessons in managing a motor, from the two machinists. Budge was helping Skeleton in the galley.

It was so rough that dinner had almost to be taken standing, and, at that, half the coffee was spilled from the cups. But the young people seemed to like it that way, and, once Captain Reeger found that the yacht was meeting the head seas well, and holding up under the battering, he grew more confident, and even condescended to tell some capital sea stories.

It grew dark early, and, with the fall of darkness, which was only partly dispelled by the lights of the *Sea Bird*, the rain came down harder. But this had one good effect, for it somewhat quieted the seas, that, occasionally now, broke over the bows, sending a shower of spray as far back as the steering wheel.

"You folks had better go below," called Captain Reeger when, having attired himself in oilskins, he came up on deck after supper, to relieve Jensen. The commander addressed Jack and Miss Manacca, who were standing together under

the awning, on the small after-deck, where the chairs had long since been lashed fast to keep them from going overboard. "I think I'll close everything down," went on the captain, "and navigate from the main cabin. The wind is getting worse."

"Just a few minutes more, captain," pleaded Miss Manacca. "It is glorious here. Isn't it, Mr. Ranger?"

"Fine!" cried Jack, who was taking in big mouthfuls of the salt air, and letting the rain dash in his bronzed face.

Captain Reeger shrugged his shoulders. Repeating his warning, he saw to it that such things as remained on deck were made snug, and then he went below, to direct the course of the vessel from there, an arrangement enabling him to steer, and look ahead, through a sort of pilot house built in one side of the motor compartment.

There seemed to come a sudden increase in the violence of the storm. Several big waves in succession made the trim little craft fairly stagger, but she poked her nose out from under the deluge of green water, and, shaking herself free, like a dog emerging from a stream, plunged on.

"I hope my brother is enjoying his trip as much as I am this," called Miss Manacca into Jack's ear, for one had to shout to be heard above the

wind. "I'm afraid he isn't though," she added, "for he is a very poor sailor. But isn't this magnificent!" and she looked around on the gloomy stretch of tumultuous waves. "I love it!"

"So do I!" cried Jack.

"Let's go forward, where we can get a good view, and then we'll go below," proposed the girl, and her companion consented. They made their way with some difficulty, for the yacht was tossing and pitching most unpleasantly. Jack extended his hand to help the Spanish girl, but, with a laugh she refused it.

"I can manage!" she said. "Thank you, though."

They stood on the forward deck, ahead of the steering wheel. The rain beat down on the shelter over their heads, and the salt spray wetted them. Miss Manacca moved over toward the rail.

"Be careful," warned Jack, in a shout. "Not too close!"

Hardly had he spoken than the *Sea Bird* gave a lunge to one side, in consequence of a big wave taking her quarteringly on the bow, and the deck slanted, almost like a porch roof. The girl lost her footing, and fell, sliding toward the frail bulwarks.

At the same instant a big, green sea boarded the vessel, and drenched her. She gave one wild

scream of fear, and Jack thought she had gone overboard.

He fairly sprang forward, holding on to anything that met his grip, to avoid falling and following the girl. Down under the deluge of water he plunged, and suddenly he felt the burden in his arms. Clasp ing her in a grip, as though he was tackling a man on the football field, running with the ball, Jack braced himself. Up against the bulwarks they came with a smash, but, somehow, he managed to interpose his body, so that he received most of the shock.

Another big, green, frothing wave came rushing at them, for the head of the *Sea Bird* was now down under tons of water. Then, as she slowly staggered free, Jack managed to maintain his grip, winding one leg around a stanchion. Then, as the water ran off the slanting deck, and he cleared his eyes from its blinding salt, and caught his breath, he saw that he had saved the girl from the sea, though a gap in the top rail of the bulwarks showed him how narrow had been their escape. It had broken near where he crashed against it.

"We—we'd better go below!" he shouted in the girl's ear.

Her face was white in the glare from a lantern that swayed with the motion of the yacht.

"You—you saved my life," she replied, and Jack led her along the now more level deck to the companionway, while the storm, in a wilder burst of fury, howled and snarled all about the *Sea Bird*.

CHAPTER XV

JACK IS PUZZLED

THEY staggered into the main cabin together, Jack and the girl whom he had saved from the fury of the sea. They were both dripping wet, and, as they entered Sam, Bony and Nat, who had been bracing themselves against the pitching and tossing of the yacht, sprang forward.

"What's the matter?" cried Nat. "Wiggling wild waves! You look as if something had happened."

"Oh, what funny expressions!" cried Miss Manacca, laughing almost hysterically. "Something did happen! If it had not been for Mr. Ranger——" she paused and looked at him. A tremor seized her.

"It wasn't anything at all," interrupted Jack, who very much disliked having a "fuss" made over him. "It got a bit rough up on deck, a wave or two drenched us, and we decided to come below. That's all."

"That's all!" echoed the girl, reproachfully. Then, with a dramatic gesture, which, somehow seemed natural to her, with her fiery, Spanish na-

ture, she exclaimed: "Let me tell you, friends, that, though he says it so easily, had it not been for him I would be—out there!" and she pointed toward the tumbling storm-tossed ocean, which was heaving the small craft about like a chip. The girl shuddered, and almost whispered. "He saved my life, and he says it was—nothing!"

There was a flash of her white teeth in a smile, and she raised her head imperiously. "Nothing?" she repeated, and she looked at Jack. "Then I am eternally your debtor, Señor, for saving—nothing," and, with a toss of her head, and a flash of a smile, wreathed in her black locks, to which the sea water clung, sparkling, she turned, and hurried to her stateroom, the old nurse coming to meet her with a huge cloak in which she enfolded her charge.

"Wow! You got yours all right, Jack," commented Bony, and he cracked his finger knuckles so loudly that, in the cabin, the noise could be heard above the roar of the storm.

"Don't you know how to behave to a lady after you rescue her?" asked Nat.

"You'll have to take a correspondence school course of instruction in politeness," added Sam. "The idea of saying it was 'nothing.' Oh, Jack!"

"Oh, cheese it, fellows," begged our hero, blushing.

"You'd better get some dry clothes on," spoke

Captain Reeger, appearing in the cabin at that moment. He had overheard in the small pilot house something that had taken place, and had called the chief machinist to relieve him for a while at the wheel. "I hope you didn't run any risks, Jack—you or Miss Manacca."

"Well, it all happened so quickly, that I couldn't tell whether we did or not. Anyhow, I'm glad it's over. I guess we'll stay below, after this, when there's a storm like the present."

"It is bad," admitted the captain, "but I have hopes that it will blow itself out before morning. It's too furious to last long."

"How's the *Sea Bird* behaving?" asked Sam.

"Like a 'bird,' as you boys would say," answered the captain. I haven't had much experience with gasoline-driven craft, but this one certainly does all that could be desired. Well, I'll get back to the wheel. Better get on dry garments, Jack."

Jack was beginning to think so himself, as he was feeling chilly. He started toward his state-room, but, before he reached it, he was met by Budge Rankin carrying a cup of steaming hot coffee.

"Thiss'lldoyougood," announced Budge, all in a breath, for he was, once more, chewing gum. "'FiwasyouI'drinktall."

"Oh, if you were me you'd drink it all, would

you?" translated Jack. "Well, I'm much obliged, Budge. Here she goes," and he sipped the hot beverage, which was most comforting. Then, attired in dry garments, Jack soon rejoined his companions in the cabin.

His chums insisted on hearing more of what had happened on deck, and he was telling them, in a most disjointed and unsatisfactory fashion, when Miss Manacca, attired in a clinging sort of gown, came in, and insisted on finishing the story, as she said it ought to be told. It is needless to say that she made Jack out quite a hero, much to that young gentleman's discomfiture.

They sat about the cabin for some time longer, and then the old negro nurse, managing to select a time between her spasms of seasickness, appeared to "tote" her pretty charge off to bed. The boys said good night, and soon turned in to their bunks. As Jack was getting ready for his berth he looked at his side. There was a big bruise on it, and it was painful to touch.

"I thought I gave that rail a pretty good whack," he murmured. "I'll be lame to-morrow."

He was, but he managed to conceal it from his friends. The storm had subsided in the night, though there was a long, uncomfortable swell on the ocean, as the yacht forged ahead. But the day was bright and fair, and, after breakfast, every one was in a jolly mood. They were making

good time, and, as Jack noted the course dotted off on the chart, and glanced at the number of knots covered, he saw, in fancy, his arrival at Porto Rico, and the chase begun after the rascally Caleb Herkimer, and the treasure box.

"But how do you imagine you're going to trace him, after you get to the island?" asked Nat, following a talk with Jack about the matter.

"Oh, I fancy Americans, carting around big boxes are not so numerous in Porto Rico, but what there will be many traces of Mr. Herkimer," replied Jack. "The only thing I'm surprised at is that he should head for such a small place, when there are so many larger islands—like Cuba, for instance."

"All the better for you," remarked Nat. "I hope we land him, and get back the——"

"Easy," cautioned Jack, for he saw Miss Manacca coming up the companionway.

The girl was in a laughing, jolly mood, and, after a turn or two about the deck, she proposed that they have a game of ring-toss, which was eagerly agreed to by the boys.

"Mr. Ranger and I will play Mr. Balmore and Mr. Anderson," announced the Spanish girl, with a smile at Jack. She seemed to think herself in duty bound to link herself with him, yet there was nothing silly in her real affection, for it was the sincere admiration of a girl who recognized that

Jack had saved her life. As Sam was down in the cabin, looking over some ship's papers with Captain Reeger, and as Budge was at the wheel, this left the three boys and Miss Manacca for the game.

It began merrily, and was carried merrily to the end. Jack and the girl won, much to her delight, for the game was a new one to her. Then they sat about the deck, and looked off across the blue ocean, occasionally seeing a passing vessel.

All that day the *Sea Bird* forged ahead. The sea grew more calm, until it was pure delight to sit under the after-awning and feel the swift motion of the little yacht, and watch the slow lifting and falling of the billows. The boys, attired in natty white suits, roamed about, attending to some light tasks they had elected to do, now paying a visit to the motor compartment, now gazing through powerful glasses at some distant sail, or watching a school of porpoises which disported themselves in the water.

It was on the third day out, when, toward the close of a fine afternoon Jack, Nat and Sam sat on the cushioned bench, near the forward transom of the trunk cabin. Sam was steering, an easy task, since the *Sea Bird* minded her helm most beautifully. There was no one else on deck at that time, Miss Manacca having gone below after a jolly game of ring-toss.

"Well, it won't be long before we're there," Sam was saying, "and we may have the good luck to capture that Herkimer fellow, Jack. But what puzzles me is how you are going to prove that he has your box. You say you and Nat didn't take off the outside wrapping paper. You don't know what the chest itself looks like, and Mr. Herkimer—if he has it—can say that it's his box, and defy you to prove otherwise."

"No, he can't," answered Jack, quietly.

"Why not?"

"Well, because in the first place there is only one box like mine. I have a full description of it in the papers that the old Spaniard gave to dad. Besides, the box has a name."

"A name—what name?" asked Nat. "I never heard of a treasure box with a name."

Jack thought he heard a noise in the cabin below him—a noise like the rustling of woman's garments, that floated up through the opened transom. He looked down, but could see nothing.

"Not so loud, Nat," Jack cautioned. "I've told you I don't want Miss Manacca to know anything of our quest, and——"

"And that she is——" began Nat, half jokingly.

"Stop it!" commanded Jack.

"But about your treasure box," went on Sam.

"What is it christened?"

"It is known as the 'Fernandez' box," was the answer. "It appears from the papers dad gave me, that it has been in the possession of the Fernandez family, or some representatives of it, for many years. But they are all dead, according to the documents, and so the Fernandez treasure box passed into the keeping of old Miguel Montez, who gave it to dad. Now it's up to me to get the Fernandez treasure box into the possession of the Ranger family, and if I do, you can wager it won't go out of my hands until I at least see what's in it."

Jack had spoken more loudly than he intended, and, as he concluded his little speech, he thought he heard a stifled cry in the main cabin. Startled, he turned to look down through the transom. The cabin was empty.

"Well, I don't know how you fellows feel about it," said Nat, after a pause, "but I'm going to interview Skeleton, and see how near it is to grub-time. I'm hungry."

"So am I. Hustle it up," added Sam.

Jack turned toward the west. The sun was just going down in a bank of golden-red and olive-tinted clouds. It was a most beautiful sight, and a more gorgeous sunset than he had witnessed since they had started on their cruise.

"Isn't that magnificent!" exclaimed Jack. "Look, fellows. It's wonderful!"

"Supper would be more wonderful," spoke Nat, unfeelingly.

"Brute—beast!" ejaculated Jack, earnestly. "I'll go tell Miss Manacca to come on deck and enjoy it with me. She has a soul for such things."

Without waiting for any comments from his chums, Jack descended the companionway, and knocked on Miss Manacca's stateroom door.

"Who—who is there?" came her voice, hesitatingly, from the other side of the portal.

"Come on deck, and see a most wonderful sunset," invited Jack.

There was no answer.

"It will be gone, if you don't hurry," he called, thinking she had not heard him.

"I—I don't want to see it," came the reply, and this time Jack heard an unmistakable sob. "Go—go away," the tearful voice of the girl went on. "Go away, please, Mr. Ranger!"

"What's the matter?" cried Jack, for the voice had ended in a burst of tears. "Are you ill? Is there anything the matter? Shall I call your nurse? Is there anything I can do?"

"You—you can go away and—and leave me alone!" was the unexpected answer. "Oh, please don't question me. I—I can't explain—Oh, I'm so—miserable!" and this time there came heavy sobs. Jack turned aside, puzzled, and not a little alarmed.

Not half an hour before Miss Manacca had been laughing and joking with him on deck, and now—Jack shrugged his shoulders. How was he to understand the moods of this girl?

CHAPTER XVI

THE DERELICT DESTROYER

JACK went back on deck, his mind still wondering over the queer conduct of the Spanish girl. He could not imagine what had so changed her, unless the loneliness of her situation, and the desire to be with her brother had brought on a fit of melancholia. And this did not seem natural, since she had been gay and happy up to within a few minutes. Nor could she have been ill, or she would have summoned her faithful attendant. Jack gave it up, and resolved to say nothing about it to his chums.

Miss Manacca did not appear at supper that evening, and, in answer to the questioning looks of his companions (for they seemed to think he ought to know the reason) Jack ventured the guess that their fair passenger had a "headache."

It was not until the next afternoon that the girl appeared. The boys were on the after-deck, talking and laughing, and, when Jack saw her coming, he hastened forward to meet her, for the yacht was pitching slightly.

"Oh, I can manage, thank you," she said,

brightly, and with something of a return of her former manner. "I feel like a prisoner that has just escaped. Isn't it glorious up here—after having been in a cabin nearly a whole day?"

"I trust you are better," ventured Jack.

"Somewhat," she answered, and her black eyes flashed a peculiar look at him. "I hope you didn't think it rude of me——" she went on, in a lower voice, intended for his ears alone. "I didn't mean to——"

"Of course not," Jack hastened to assure her. "I—I understand." He didn't in the least, but he thought it best to pretend that he did. "I'm glad you are better," he went on.

"Yes," she answered, non-committally. "Oh, how lovely it is up here! How much longer before we reach Porto Rico?" she asked suddenly, addressing the boys generally.

"Hard to tell," answered Sam. "The motor is doing good work, but it's one of those things you never can depend on. We may pick it up in a couple of days, or we may not for a week, according to the wind, and whether or not the motor breaks down."

"Oh, you don't think we will have any more storms, do you?" and the girl looked alarmed. "And is the motor—the engine—going to break?"

"We hope not," answered Jack quickly, winking at Sam to warn him to avoid making such re-

marks in the future. "I think we will reach Porto Rico in about a week—that is if we have no delays."

"Oh, I hope we have none!" exclaimed the girl, fervently. "I am so anxious to get back to my home."

They sat on deck and talked for some little time, and, after a bit, Miss Manacca seemed to be more like her former jolly self. She laughed and sang, to the accompaniment of her guitar.

That evening, when she and Jack happened to be alone on the deck, for there was a beautiful moon, and no one wanted to turn in, Miss Manacca said:

"Mr. Ranger, I wish you would answer me truthfully one question."

"What is it?" inquired Jack, his heart beating strangely. He felt in his pocket to see if the hat-pin was still there. Could it be in reference to that? A moment later she went on:

"Will you tell me exactly why you are going to Porto Rico?"

Jack started, and his hand came in contact with the guitar, which was on a camp stool. There was a musical twanging of the strings.

"Why do you ask that?" he wanted to know.

"Because I have serious reasons."

"I—I can't tell you," was Jack's hesitating answer, and, with a half-reproachful look at him,

Miss Manacca took up her instrument and went to her stateroom.

It was toward noon the next day, when Hanson, the assistant engineer, was standing near the bell, waiting to mark the hour, that he called out:

"Sail ho!"

"Where?" asked Captain Reeger quickly.

"Dead ahead," was the answer. "It's a steamer."

"Bring me the glasses," ordered the commander, and when he had looked through them he uttered an exclamation.

"Here, boys, is something worth seeing," he called to Jack and his chums, who were grouped about Miss Manacca on the after-deck.

"What is it?" cried Nat. "Petrified persimmons! Don't tell me it's a whale?"

"Something almost as rare in these waters," went on Captain Reeger. "That is the United States derelict-destroying vessel, *Seneca*. She goes about, hunting for half submerged wrecks, and, when found, blows them up with a charge of gun cotton."

"High-stepping hippopotamuses!" cried Nat. "I wish we could see them destroy one."

"I think we can," the captain cautioned. "They are evidently about to blow up one now, as nearly as I can make out through these glasses. There is some big object, low in the water, near the

vessel, and small boats are around it. I think we can afford to delay a bit and take a look. What do you boys say? It's up to you."

"Sure," said Sam, who was looked to as the owner's representative aboard. "Eh, Jack?"

"Of course. It will be worth seeing."

The *Sea Bird*, which was headed directly for the derelict destroyer, was speeded up somewhat, as the motor had been slowed down to about three-quarters of its limit, and soon, without the aid of the glasses, the half-submerged wreck could be seen. It was lying under the quarter of the *Seneca*, and small boats could be seen plying from one craft to the other.

"The sailors are placing charges of gun cotton in the derelict hull," Captain Reeger explained. "When there's enough in to blow apart the wreck, and sink it, so that it will no longer be a menace to navigation, the small boats will withdraw, after a fuse has been lighted, and the government ship will get out of danger. Then you'll see a strange sight."

"Isn't it dangerous?" asked Miss Manacca, who was as interested as were the boys.

"Yes, extremely so, for it's no easy matter to carry charges of gun cotton in a small boat up to a floating wreck, and plant it where it will do the most good. Besides the danger of the explosive going off prematurely, there is the hard work and

risk in making a suitable opening in the wreck to admit the insertion of the gun cotton. Often several trials are necessary before a wreck is blown up enough so that it will sink. Some of the derelicts float about for many months."

"How do they find them?" asked Bony.

"Oh, ship captains report the location of them to the government, and the destroyer is sent out to cruise around in the neighborhood where the wreck was last seen. But, in the meanwhile, a storm, or the ocean currents, may have carried it hundreds of miles away."

"Then what does the destroyer do?" Sam inquired.

"Hunts about until it picks up the wreck," replied Mr. Reeger. "It is tiresome, dangerous and weary work, but very necessary. Many a good ship has met her doom by crashing into a half-submerged wreck in the darkness or fog, or, in the case of one just awash, in the day time. Lumber vessels are the worst, for they float so long, on account of the nature of their cargo, and it is hard to destroy them, even with gun cotton."

By this time the *Sea Bird* was within easy seeing distance of the wreck, and the destroyer. Sailors could be observed on the upturned bottom of the wreck, chopping holes in the hull, for it had turned turtle. Other boats were bringing up sup-

plies of gun cotton, for many hundreds of pounds are often used to blow up a single wreck.

Suddenly some signal flags were run up on the mast of the government vessel, and Captain Reeger answered with blasts from the whistle.

"What's that for?" asked Jack.

"They're warning us to keep away," was the reply. "I guess we're close enough as it is. There's quite a disturbance of the sea when the explosion takes place. We'll slow down, and watch. They must be about ready to blow it up."

The *Sea Bird* was barely moving on the water. The boys, and Miss Manacca, eagerly watched the operations of the sailors, and Budge even forgot to chew his gum. In a short time all the small boats began leaving the vicinity of the wreck. The sailors boarded the steamship, which, with warning blasts of her whistle, began to move away from the derelict that was about to be blown up.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ACCIDENT

THE two vessels—the United States derelict destroyer and the pleasure yacht—were so close that the commands from the former could plainly be heard aboard the *Sea Bird*.

“Is everything clear?” called the commander of the *Seneca* to some one, evidently well forward, who was keeping a watch on the wreck.

“Aye, aye, sir,” came the prompt response.

“Can you see the fuse burning?”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

“Then we’ll get farther back.”

The destroyer gathered sternway, and began to swing about in a broad circle. Then the officer in charge caught sight of the *Sea Bird*.

“What vessel is that?” he called through a megaphone.

Captain Reeger answered, giving the necessary information.

“You must get farther off,” came the warning. “We have put a very heavy charge in the wreck, and there’s bound to be a lot of water raised, and

quite a swell. Stand well away, and don't get too close to us."

"All right," answered Captain Reeger, and he signalled to the motor room for full speed astern.

The eyes of all aboard the *Sea Bird*, as well as those on the government ship, were now fixed on the wreck. Soon it would be nothing but splinters of wood, and a mass of twisted iron and steel, and would sink to the bottom.

"I wonder what vessel it was?" mused Miss Manacca, who was at Jack's side. "Perhaps the sailors once aboard her were all killed or drowned. What an unwritten tragedy is before us!"

"Yes," answered Jack, wondering at the unusually sad tone in the girl's voice. "But we will soon see the end of it. I guess it must be about to go off. The government vessel is slacking speed to watch the result."

The destroyer was now almost motionless on the water, and Captain Reeger, thinking that he, too, was far enough off, gave the signal to lay to, and stop the motor.

As he did so there came a hail from the larger ship, but as the wind was blowing from the *Sea Bird* to the destroyer, the words could not be made out.

"What's he saying?" asked Jack.

"I don't know," replied Captain Reeger, "unless he's telling us that the explosion is about to

take place. Now watch, every one, and you'll see a curious sight."

Hardly had he spoken than there came a dull rumble, and it sounded as if it was thundering under water. There was a tremor to the pleasure yacht, and it swayed slightly.

Then a black cloud seemed to shoot straight up into the air from the location of the wreck. It was like a great geyser—a gigantic fountain of water that foamed and bubbled into whiteness as it spouted upward, the central part one vast, solid column, while on the outer circumference there was a spray, the sun turning the drops into miniature rainbows.

"Cracking centipedes! There she goes!" cried Nat.

"That's the end of her," added Jack, more solemnly.

There was a roar, as the confined gases generated by the exploding gun cotton rushed up from beneath the surface of the water, and then, as the wreck disappeared from view in a tumultuous backward rush, and falling of the water, a gigantic wave, caused by the disturbance, swept toward the government vessel and the *Sea Bird*.

"Look out!" shouted Captain Reeger. "Hold fast everybody! This may swamp us!"

Above the subsiding roar of the rushing waters could be heard a frantic hail from the United

States vessel, but what was said could not be distinguished. The great wave was now almost upon the yacht, and was about to quarter it, for with no steerageway, her head could not be put about to meet it.

Captain Reeger leaped to the steering wheel, and frantically shoved the telegraph lever over to "full speed ahead." There was a jangle of bells, and, down in the motor room, Jensen, the machinist, threw over the levers, and the big fly wheel began to revolve.

But it was too late to get into motion, and a moment later the big wave fairly slapped the *Sea Bird* on her port quarter, slewing her around, and all but tossing her on her beams' ends. Masses of water came aboard, and sloshed around, wetting the passengers, who, instinctively clung to the nearest supports.

The steering wheel, which Captain Reeger grasped, was nearly torn from his hands, so strong was the sudden action of the rush of water on the rudder, but, with a quick motion, he wrenched it around.

By this time the motor had begun to forge the yacht ahead, and it swung with bow squarely on to meet a succession of smaller waves which followed the large one.

Like some strong swimmer, staggered by the first onslaught of the breakers, the *Sea Bird* shook

herself free from the masses of green ocean, and forged ahead. Swiftly she bore down on the government vessel, which had ridden out the upheaval to better advantage, on account of her size.

"Look out where you're going!" came a hail from the derelict destroyer. "You'll run us down in a moment!"

"As if I didn't know how to steer!" said Captain Reeger to Jack.

He twisted the wheel around, at first with an assurance that it would quickly change the course of the yacht, and then, as he felt, instinctively, that something was wrong, the captain frantically spun it to port. But the *Sea Bird* ignored her helm, and bore straight on toward the *Seneca*.

"Look out! Look out!" cried the commander of the government vessel. "You'll foul me in another second!"

Frantically Captain Reeger twisted the wheel. He could not change the course of the yacht.

"We've had an accident!" he cried to Jack and Sam, who sprang forward to aid him. "Our steering gear is broken," and he shoved the lever of the telegraph over to "full speed astern."

The *Sea Bird* had been disabled by the explosion that had destroyed the derelict.

CHAPTER XVIII

LIMPING TO PORT

SLOWLY the yacht ceased to move toward the derelict destroyer. She came to a stop and then, under the force of the powerful screw, which was racing around to pull her back, she began to gather sternway, and slid out of any danger of a collision.

"What's the matter?" asked a gold-laced and uniformed officer from the bridge of the *Seneca*.

"Steering gear's out of commission," responded Captain Reeger. "That big wave did it, I fancy."

"I was afraid you were drawing too close," went on the uniformed officer. "But can we give you any assistance? I'll send my first lieutenant aboard, and perhaps he can show you how to patch up. We're used to doing all sorts of odd jobs. I'll send a boat."

"Thanks," replied Captain Reeger, and calling Jensen, the chief machinist, the commander went aft to see what the damage was, instructing Sam, Jack and the others to lower the accommodation ladder, and be ready to receive the lieutenant, and his helpers, when they should arrive.

The lieutenant proved to be a young chap, not

long out of Annapolis, but he knew his business, and, looking over the damaged steering gear, announced that while he could repair it temporarily the *Sea Bird* would have to put back into port to have a lasting repair job made.

"Put back into port!" echoed Jack, in dismay.

"Yes," answered the lieutenant. "It wouldn't be safe to make much of a voyage with the gear in such shape as I can put it temporarily."

"But we don't want to go all the way back to New York," said Nat.

"We have important business in Porto Rico," went on Jack. "We want to catch——" He stopped, for, at that moment, he saw Miss Manacca coming up the companionway. There was a curious look on her face.

"Oh, I didn't mean to go back to New York," the lieutenant replied. "You are about two hundred and fifty miles off Charleston harbor now. If you put in there you will be able to get fixed up in good shape."

"But the delay!" complained Jack.

"It won't be so much," broke in Captain Reeger. "I intended to put in at St. Augustine, anyhow, for more gasolene, as the motor uses more than I thought she would, and our supply is running low. Now we can get it at Charleston, and, at the same time, have the steering gear fixed. We won't lose so much time."

There was no help for it, and, after the lieutenant and his men from the *Seneca* had assisted Captain Reeger and his machinists in making temporary repairs, it was found that the *Sea Bird* would once more answer her helm.

"But you'll have to run slowly," cautioned the lieutenant. "It's only a poor job at the best. You'll have to limp into Charleston harbor."

And "limp" the yacht did. The lieutenant and his crew returned to the destroyer, carrying the thanks of Jack and his chums, and then, amid the waving of farewells the *Sea Bird* turned about, and made for the South Carolina city.

"Is—is it anything dangerous?" asked Miss Manacca, when they were well under way again. "Do you think we are in any danger, Mr. Ranger?"

"None at all," Jack assured her. "It will only delay us a few days."

"And are you very anxious to get to Porto Rico?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jack, "and—so are you; aren't you?"

"Surely, for I want to learn how my brother fared in getting back our inheritance. I am so—so anxious. You know it is not pleasant to be—poor! But I have become almost used to it by this time.

Though the girl was more like what she had

been when she first came aboard, Jack was puzzled about her, and he wondered what connection her hatpin, found near the looted safe, had with the theft of his treasure box. But he had to give up trying to find a solution.

Several days were consumed in making the trip to Charleston, as they went slowly on account of the break in the gear, but the temporary repairs seemed to be holding well.

Jack and his companions did considerable work about the yacht, even to swabbing down the decks, helping clean and oil the motor, keeping the bright work polished, and other tasks which Captain Reeger allowed them to perform.

The schoolboy yachtsmen took readily to the self-imposed labors, even if they were not the most pleasant, and the members of the crew wondered why the lads seemed to like such work.

"I'll tell you why," replied Jack, when one of the machinists ventured to speak of it. "There's nothing like doing a thing yourself; eh, Sam?"

"No, indeed. If I had my way we fellows would run this yacht all alone."

"Yes, run her into Davy Jone's locker, I guess," remarked Nat.

"Not much!" cried Jack, with energy. "Didn't we have some experience on the *Polly Ann*? Now we're getting more, and it will be good for us."

"In case there should be a mutiny aboard," put

in Sam, "we fellows could take command, and sail to some port. That is, we could if we knew how to navigate, and I think we could pick that up in time. I'm going to ask Captain Reeger to show us how it's done."

The lads made this request later, and the commander gave them some lessons in using the quadrant and other instruments for working out a reckoning. The boys made out fairly well, and were so fascinated by the science that they were on hand every noon, when the observation was taken.

"Hello, Skeleton!" called Sam one afternoon, as he saw the stout cook strolling slowly along the deck. "I say, Skeleton, why don't you be a little more polite to Musa, the chaperone with Miss Manacca. I haven't seen you talking to her hardly any."

"Ah done did ast her ef she didn't want t' set out in de moonshine one night," confessed the knight of the galley.

"What'd she say?" asked Bony, snapping his knuckles in rapid succession.

"She didn't say nuffin," confessed Skeleton. "She jes' up an' fetch me such a box on mah ear dat I done feel it yet," and he rubbed the side of his head reflectively. "I guess she didn't understand' United States talk," he went on.

"Maybe it's a Spanish sign that a person loves

you, when they hit you a clip on the ear," suggested Jack.

"Den I doan't want t' be lubbed!" exclaimed Skeleton, vigorously. "'Scuse me," he added quickly, "I done guess mah potatoes am burnin'," and he made a hasty exit. The reason was plain a moment later, for the colored woman came up on deck. She had gotten the better of her seasickness, and wanted a breath of air.

The *Sea Bird* skimmed along at slightly increased speed, and soon the shore line became more pronounced. By means of glasses Charleston harbor could be made out, and it rapidly grew more plain.

"We'll be there before dark," said Captain Reeger, "for which I'm glad. We can dock, and get at the repairs the first thing in the morning."

The sun broke from beneath some clouds, forming a gorgeous scene, and Jack, who felt that he had rather slighted Miss Manacca of late, seeing that she was not on deck, went below to ask her to come up and view the sights.

Her stateroom door was slightly ajar, and Jack knocked softly. There was no answer, and, thinking she might have fallen into a doze, he pushed the portal slightly. The room was untenanted, but it showed evidences of its occupant having recently left.

"Perhaps she went up by the forward compan-

ionway," said Jack. As he turned aside, he saw, lying on the floor of the stateroom, a small, leather handbag, such as women use for the carrying of various articles. It was an expensive one, and, fearing it might be stepped on, Jack entered the apartment, and picked it up, intending to place it on the dresser. As he turned the bag over he saw, in brass letters on the side, the initials of the owner. But, to his surprise, instead of being M. M., or Maximina Manacca, the letters were L. F.

"L. F.," murmured Jack. "L. F.! What can they stand for, I wonder? She said her name was Manacca, and yet—L. F.——"

He stood puzzling over the matter, looking down at the bag in his hand, when a step sounded outside the stateroom, and, before he could turn, Miss Manacca entered. She started back at the sight of Jack.

"You—you—here?" she gasped.

"I came to call you on deck to see the sunset," he answered. "I saw this on the floor, and picked it up for fear it might be stepped on. Is it yours?"

He extended it toward her, with the initials uppermost. The girl hesitated a moment, looked fearlessly at Jack and then at the handbag.

"It is mine," she said simply.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STRANGE VESSEL

FOR several seconds neither of the two in the small stateroom spoke. Jack did not know what to remark, and, as for the girl, who shall say what varying emotions swayed her? Her cheeks flushed red under the dark skin. She took the bag from Jack's hand, and laid it on the dresser.

"Is—is the sunset worth seeing?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, with an effort, "and we are coming into Charleston harbor."

"Oh, then I must go up on deck," she cried. "I was in my nurse's room for a few minutes. Come, Mr. Ranger, we will go up."

She seemed to have regained her usual spirits, and, with an inviting gesture, she held out her hand to Jack. With a little bow, and a smile, he took it, and led her to the companionway. It was like the declaring of an armistice, he thought.

"How glad I shall be to see land once more," the girl went on. "I'm afraid I'm getting tired of the sea—but not much," she added quickly. "One could not weary of it on this beautiful vessel, and with such charming shipmates," and she made a little bow to Jack.

He was puzzled, worried—he did not know what to think; yet the girl seemed more at ease than ever, even though Jack had fairly caught her masquerading under an assumed name, or, if not that, she had a handbag not her own. Which was it? Jack shrugged his shoulders?

They reached the deck. The harbor was looming up in sight now, and the lighthouse and life-saving station at the entrance could be seen. It was still quite a run up the bay to the city proper. The sun was painting the clouds in a glorious combination of pink, olive green and purple, and the water reflected the wonderful tints.

“Oh, isn’t it beautiful!” cried Miss Manacca, as she stood on the after deck, and gazed across the bay, while Jack and his chums, looking from the girl, off at the sunset, and back again, thought that the scene from nature was not half so fine as the picture the Spanish beauty made as she stood there, with the wind blowing her hair about.

They made good time up to a dock, and learned on inquiry that, nearby, there were repair facilities, so at dusk they made fast, just as Skeleton announced that supper was ready.

“And none too soon,” declared Nat. “Wobbling window blinds! I could eat a bit of stewed whale, with seaweed dressing.”

“Hurry up and have grub,” advised Sam, “and then we’ll go on shore. I want to stretch my legs.

"That's so," put in Jack, "I guess we *will* have time to mosey about."

"And send some telegrams to the folks," added Bony.

"Are you coming, Budge?" asked Nat, for the odd lad had not spoken.

"Guess I'll stay ere," was the jumbled answer.

"Stay here? What for?" asked Jack.

"'Fraid I'll get lost. Anyhow, I'm tired," and Budge got rid of one wad of gum, and prepared to insert a fresh supply, which accounted for his last sentence being spoken more plainly.

"Well, do you want us to get anything for you—or mail any letters?" asked Jack.

"Nobody'll writet'me," replied Budge, that being his version of "nobody will write to me." The inference was plain; he would write to no one. Budge was an orphan, with no near relatives, and letter-writing was not one of his duties.

"Well, is there anything you want?" asked Nat.

"S'more gum," was all Budge said, but they all knew what he meant.

Captain Ranger went ashore after supper, to make arrangements for the repair of the steering gear, and the boys accompanied him. Miss Manacca remained on board with her attendant, saying she was too tired to visit the city, but might go the next day.

The boys, who soon separated from Captain

Reeger, found Charleston an interesting enough place, though it could not be seen to advantage at night, even if there was a brilliant moon. But they strolled about, after sending some souvenir postals home, and buying some gum for Budge Rankin.

"Now, I'll stand treat for ice-cream sodas," called Jack, when they were thinking of returning to the *Sea-Bird*.

"Good!" cried Sam. "It's about time you loosened up, Jack. I was beginning to think you were going to wait until you got your treasure box before you——"

Jack, with a quick motion, sprang to Sam's side, and grasped him by the arm. They were turning a street corner at the time, and three men had just swung around it ahead of them.

"What's the matter?" demanded Sam, wondering at his chum's conduct. "Can't I——"

"Hush!" exclaimed Jack in a whisper. "Did you see who those fellows were?"

"No, but if they're pickpockets, you needn't jump at me like that."

"They're worse than pickpockets," was Jack's answer, as he drew his companions into the shadow of a building.

"Who were they?" asked Nat.

"Jerry Chowden, Hemp Smith and Jonas Lavine," was our hero's unexpected reply.

For a moment Jack's chums hardly comprehended what he said. That three of their worst enemies should be so near at hand—that they should come upon them so unexpectedly in this southern city—seemed incredible.

"Are you sure it was them?" asked Sam.

"Sure," replied Jack. "I had a glimpse of them just as you began to speak, and it *was* only a glimpse, under the glare of that arc light. I know I'm not mistaken, though. Fortunately, they didn't see me—nor any of you, and I hope they didn't hear what you said, Sam."

"Why?"

"Why? Because, boys, I believe those fellows had something to do with the theft of my treasure box, and I don't want them to know that I'm on their trail."

"Your treasure box?" repeated Sam. "Why, I thought you were sure that Caleb Herkimer took it."

"So I am, but Lavine, and the others, may have helped him. Lavine would do me a bad turn, if he could."

"But he and Jerry didn't sail until after Caleb did, and they went in the *Dolphin*, with that Spanish fellow," said Nat.

"I know it, and maybe that Spanish fellow——"

"Or his pretty sister," interrupted Nat.

"Cut it out," cried Jack, half angrily. "What

I mean is that perhaps the sailing of the Spaniard, Lavine and Chowden on the *Dolphin* may have been only a coincidence. Manacca may have been about to start for Porto Rico, and those scoundrels may have gone with him. They might want to reach Porto Rico, to meet Caleb Herkimer and share up the loot. That is, providing they worked together."

"That's so," admitted Sam. "Say, but it's getting more and more complicated."

"And there is a bare chance that Herkimer stopped off here on his way to Porto Rico," went on Jack. "He may have done that to baffle pursuit. Perhaps he is now with Lavine and the other on a ship in this harbor. The Spaniard may also be with them. If he is—well, I suppose it will be best to notify his sister," Jack finished rather awkwardly.

"But if that's Hemp Smith, *alias* Marinello Booghoobally, *alias* Professor Punjab, and if Jerry Chowden and Jonas Lavine are with him, they're here for no good," said Nat, excitedly. "Maybe they are following us."

"Hardly," declared Jack. "It was only by accident that we put in here, and they could not know that. No, I'm inclined to think they were here before we arrived."

"Then let's take after 'em!" cried Bony, crack-

ing his knuckles like pop-guns. "Let's find out where they are stopping!"

"Sure!" added Sam, and, without more words, the boys, with Jack in the lead, swung around the corner. The street, down which the trio of rascals had passed, was not crowded, and our friends expected to see their three enemies in plain sight, for not more than half a minute had elapsed since Jack had sighted them. But they were not to be seen. The street was deserted.

"They've disappeared!" cried Bony Balmore.

"Vanished," added Sam.

"Mystified molasses!" ejaculated Nat. "That was a quick move! Maybe they're hiding in the shadows, or have gone into some building."

"The last is more likely," decided Jack. "We'll cross the street, and go down on the other side. Maybe we'll see them."

But they did not, though they went the entire length of the street, which led down to the water front, and even retraced their steps. Hemp Smith, and the others, had evidently gone into some building, and it was out of the question to decide which one.

"Well, we may as well go back to the yacht," suggested Jack. "Perhaps we can pick them up in the morning, or get some information about them. I wonder if Caleb Herkimer is with them?"

"If he is, he'll keep mighty shady," was Sam's opinion. "Say, Jack, maybe the *Dolphin* broke down, and had to put in here for repairs, the same as we did."

"It's possible," admitted Jack.

They found Captain Reeger on board when they arrived, and he announced that he had made arrangements for the repairs to be begun early the next morning. In turn they told him about seeing his old enemy, Lavine, at which news the captain was a bit alarmed.

"We'll go to the police in the morning," he said, "and see if we can cause their arrest."

"Better go to-night," was Jack's opinion, and another trip to the city was made, police headquarters being visited.

There the chief promised to have his detectives look for the trio, or, rather, the quartette, for Caleb Herkimer was included. At Jack's suggestion the harbor records were looked up, but no vessel bearing the name *Dolphin* had registered.

"There's one motor craft in besides yours," the chief said, after a talk with the harbor master over the telephone, "but the names of the crews and passengers are all different from those you give."

"They might change their names," said Nat.

The chief of police promised to have an inves-

tigation made, and with this our friends had to be content. Once more they went back to the *Sea Bird*, and they were tired enough to turn in and sleep.

When the repairs were started the next morning the boys once more went ashore. But there was no favorable news for them, and they concluded that Hemp Smith, and the others, must have left town during the night. The boys put in the remainder of the day visiting historical places in and about the city. On their return late in the afternoon Captain Reeger informed them that they would sail early the next morning, the repairs having been completed, and a fresh supply of gasoline taken aboard.

Bright and early the start was made, Skeleton having breakfast ready on record time. As the *Sea Bird* swung away from her dock, and dropped down the bay toward the ocean, Miss Manacca came up on deck.

"You missed a trip ashore," said Jack. "I thought you were going to see some of the sights. It's a nice place."

"I was going to," answered the girl, "but I didn't feel very well. My head has ached lately, and I'm not used to such actions on its part."

"That's too bad," spoke Jack, sympathetically. "Perhaps when we get to sea once more you'll be better."

"I hope so," she went on, with a smile. "Oh, I love the sea! Our home in Porto Rico is on a beautiful bay, and I have my own little sailboat. I hope, sometime——"

She broke off what she was saying, and looked across to where several boats, tugs and others, were manœuvering to get up to or away from a wharf. The girl's gaze seemed fixed on a certain vessel. She went closer to the rail, and leaned over, watching earnestly. Jack's gaze followed hers, and he saw a trim motor craft, slightly larger, and evidently much more speedy than the *Sea Bird*, making her way out of a tangle of other craft.

"That—that yacht!" exclaimed Miss Manacca. "That is the one my brother sailed on for Porto Rico!"

"Your brother!" cried Jack. "Is he on that vessel? Have you ever seen it before?"

"No, but it is exactly of the same description as the one he wrote he was to sail on. She is the same color and build, and I know something of boats."

"But you told me your brother sailed on the *Dolphin*!" cried Jack, wondering again if there could be any connection in the presence on the same craft of Chowden, Smith, Lavine, and the Spaniard.

"He did sail on the *Dolphin*," declared Miss Manacca.

"That boat is the *Annabell*," went on Jack, as he caught sight of the name under the stern.

"The *Annabell*?" queried Miss Manacca. "I—I can't understand. It is exactly the same as the *Dolphin*."

Jack caught up a pair of glasses, and leveled them at the other motor yacht, which was rapidly dropping down the harbor. He fixed the binoculars on the name. To his surprise it showed plainly that it was freshly painted, and it seemed to have been hurriedly done, so that another name showed faintly under the word "*Annabell*."

"If it should be her!" murmured Jack. "It might be."

The distance between the two craft was momentarily widening. Suddenly a figure on the strange yacht that was head of the *Sea Bird* came aft, and peered over the rail, gazing at Sam's uncle's yacht through a glass. Quickly Jack trained his own glasses on the figure. He almost dropped the binoculars, for the face that loomed up in them was that of Hemp Smith, *alias* Marinello Booghoobally. And grouped behind him could be seen Jerry Chowden and Jonas Lavine. There was one other figure, and Jack was almost sure who it was before he looked carefully. His rapid gaze through the glasses confirmed his fear, for there,

on the deck, stood the Spandiard whom Jack and Nat had encountered in Denton—the brother of Miss Manacca.

Jack lowered the glasses, and looked at the girl near him. She was still gazing after the strange vessel, evidently puzzled over its resemblance to the *Dolphin*, but unable to account for the change of name. She had, obviously, not recognized any of the figures on deck, and, as she was standing in the shadow of an awning, Jack felt sure that the Spaniard had not seen his sister. Besides, the Spaniard had no glasses.

But there was no sight of Caleb Herkimer, and Jack felt that he had been wrong in thinking that the thief of the treasure box had joined Lavine and the others. Meanwhile something seemed to cause excitement among the men on the after deck of the *Annabell*.

The glasses, as Jack could see, were passed from hand to hand.

"They have evidently recognized me," thought our hero. "I wonder if we can catch them?"

He was about to ask Captain Reeger to make more speed, when the engine of the *Sea Bird* suddenly stopped, and the craft she was pursuing shot ahead under increased power. Jack's enemies were escaping.

CHAPTER XX

THE HATPIN

"WHY are we stopping?" cried Miss Manacca, in some alarm.

"I don't know, but I'll find out," answered Jack. He took one more observation through the glasses. He could still see the rascals on the after deck of the *Annabell*, gazing at him. Pursuit was now out of the question, for by the time the *Sea Bird* got under way again, the swifter vessel would have a lead that would be hard to overcome. And that those on board her intended to make the best of their chance was evident. The Spaniard, as Jack could see, remained aloof, a solitary figure, not mingling with the others.

"Perhaps some one is hurt," suggested Miss Manacca, while a series of sounds, as of some one pounding on metal, came from the motor room. She looked apprehensively at Jack, and seemed to have forgotten her interest in the strange vessel that bore so remarkable a resemblance to the one her brother had described to her. Nay, it was the very same yacht, Jack felt, and he believed

the name had been changed to deceive those who might be making a pursuit of the *Dolphin*.

"Though as long as Caleb Herkimer isn't aboard I don't see what they have to fear," reasoned Jack. "He's the one I want most—him and my treasure box, though the Spaniard and the others may be up to some game."

But Jack had little time for reflection. He wanted to see what had happened in the engine room, and hurried thither. He found there Captain Reeger, Jensen and Sam.

"What's up?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"Only some of the spark plugs out of order," replied Jensen. "I'll soon have 'em going again. I bought some in Charleston, in anticipation of an emergency, and it's a good thing I did. I knocked a monkey wrench down, and cracked the porcelain on a couple. We'll soon be under way again."

"How long?" asked Jack.

"Oh, about fifteen minutes."

"That'll be too late," was our hero's comment, and when Captain Reeger, who overheard his remark, asked why, Jack told about the presence on board the *Annabell* of their enemies.

"We'll try to catch them," said the captain eagerly, and he helped change the spark plugs. But when the *Sea Bird* was in motion again, the other vessel was not in sight. And, as they ran

into a slight haze in approaching the mouth of the harbor, it was out of the question to look for the suspicious craft that had so recently changed her name. Had she gone on to Porto Rico, or back up the Atlantic Coast? Jack would have given a great deal to know, not only that he might the better understand what he was to do in regard to Miss Manacca, but also in reference to his stolen treasure box.

The *Sea Bird* passed out on the Atlantic, and, on the bounding billows, with her motor speeded up to the last notch, she was once more making good time to Porto Rico. That day, and the next, passed pleasantly. The schoolboys enjoyed to their utmost their yachting trip, and even the thought that they were after a criminal did not detract from their pleasure. Miss Manacca seemed more like herself, and laughed and joked in her former style. The moonlight nights on deck were ones to be long remembered, as, grouped under the awning, while the silver-crested waves slipped past on either side, they sang college songs and more or less sentimental ditties, to the accompaniment of the Spanish girl's guitar.

"And to think that I will soon be in dear Porto Rico!" she exclaimed. "I must insist that all you young gentlemen call to see my brother and myself. He will want to thank you for having brought me home, after he deserted me. But I

know he never intended to do it," she added hastily. "There was some good reason. He thought I had money, perhaps, and would stay in New York until he could send for me. But it all happened for the best, and I have thoroughly enjoyed my trip on the *Sea Bird*. I'll sing a Spanish sea-song for you," and she did, in such a rollicking manner that Jack and the others felt constrained to join in the chorus, though they had to improvise English words for it.

"Well, another day ought to put us close to Cuba," announced Captain Reeger, one afternoon, when the yacht was slipping along over a calm sea. "Then it will be no time at all until we reach Porto Rico."

"Oh, how grand!" cried the girl. "Then I shall be at home, and you——" she paused, and looked at Jack, who was sitting near her on deck. Captain Reeger had gone forward.

"I have some business to attend to," he replied in some confusion.

"I wish you all success," said Miss Manacca sincerely, and she gazed at Jack curiously.

"Thanks," he murmured. He was wondering what she had done with the handbag with the initials, L. F., on the side.

The girl arose from her steamer chair, and a book she had been making a pretense of reading slid to the deck. Jack stooped over to pick

it up, and, as he did so, something slipped from his pocket, and fell, with a tinkle, to the white painted boards. The girl glanced quickly down, and Jack made a grab for the object. It was the hatpin found near the looted safe. It had fallen from his pocket.

He tried to put it back without attracting the attention of the Spanish girl, but a hatpin is rather an awkward object to handle—especially for a young man, and Jack was not succeeding very well. Miss Manacca had a glimpse of the jeweled head.

"What is that?" she asked quickly.

"Nothing—that is, it's—er——" stammered Jack. The secret he had been trying to keep seemed about to be revealed.

"Nothing?" asked the girl, her eyes widening in surprise. "It sounded like something. It looked like——"

Jack gave a little start. He had stuck himself on the pin point, the cork he had fixed to it having come off. Before he could prevent it the pin had again fallen to the deck, and was in plain sight, the red jewel glowing ruby-red in the sun.

"Why—why—that—that——" began Miss Manacca, picking up the hatpin before Jack could reach it. "That's mine!" she cried. "Where did you get it, Mr. Ranger?"

"Yours?" echoed Jack. He had expected to see her deny the ownership. All these days he

had been hiding the hatpin as a damaging bit of evidence; he had forbidden his chums to so much as hint at it, yet at the first sight of it Miss Manacca claimed it. What did it mean?

"Where did you get it?" she asked, wonderingly. "I have been heart-broken over its loss. It is a family heirloom."

"I—I found it," stammered Jack, wondering what would be best to say, and then, resolving to put the matter to the test, he decided to tell the truth.

"It was found in the office of Judge Bennett, in Denton," he said. "Near the safe."

"In Judge Bennett's office?" repeated the girl. "Is that the place where a man with a funny name worked? A name something like a cablegram?"

"Caleb Herkimer?" questioned Jack, wondering what was coming next.

"That's it!" cried the girl, clapping her hands in delight. "I have been trying for the longest time to recall that name. It is such an odd one—all you Americans have odd names, though Jack Ranger is not so bad," and she laughed mischievously. "I knew I lost my hatpin in Mr. Caleb's office," she went on, "but my brother would not let me go back to look. He hurried me away. It was at night. And so Judge Bennett had also his office there? I presume he is what we call an advocate—a lawyer."

"Yes," assented Jack. "Were you there?" He hated to put the question. But quickly came the answer, given with all the innocence in the world.

"I went there one night with my brother," said Miss Manacca. "It was after dark. It was the same night we left Denton, and came to New York. Yes, I was in Mr. Caleb's—or Judge Bennett's office, and it was there I lost my hatpin. Oh, I'm so glad to get it back again!" and there was not a trace of guilt in the eyes that looked at Jack Ranger. As for our hero, he did not know what to think, or say, or do. The whole mystery seemed to be getting more and more tangled.

CHAPTER XXI

BUDGE IS TANGLED UP

MISS MANACCA was looking carefully at the hatpin, as if to ascertain whether or not it had been damaged during the time Jack had it. She seemed to find it satisfactory.

"It's rather a curious design," remarked Jack, hoping he might lead her into some conversation about it.

"Yes, it is quite rare. The jewel and its setting was originally a breastpin, and it has quite a history. It was made by some ancient Indian or Mexican tribe, I believe. After my brother gave it to me, I had it made into a hatpin."

"Your brother gave it to you?" repeated Jack. Anxiously he waited for her answer.

"Yes it was a present from my brother," she went on. "There is quite a curious history connected with it. Perhaps I shall tell it to you some day, but just now I am anxious to know how you got it. Did you find it in the lawyer's office?"

"Yes, I picked it up."

"Then you were perhaps there on business?"

she suggested. "Is Mr. Caleb—I never can think of his other name—is he a friend of yours?"

"Not exactly, but he worked for Judge Bennett, who is our lawyer."

"Ah, then you were in the office on law business? I hope you are in no legal difficulties. Ah, my poor father! He was always at law, and that made him poor."

"No, I wasn't exactly in legal difficulties," said Jack, a bit awkwardly. "I was in the office looking after some property of mine." Thus he designated his treasure box. How was he going to tell Miss Manacca that, for a time, suspicion had pointed to her—aye, did even yet? For what was she doing in the lawyer's office the night the box was stolen?

"Well, I never can thank you enough for restoring my pin to me," went on the girl. "I should have gone back to search for it, only we left in such a hurry, and my brother was so anxious to get away, and Mr. Caleb was so anxious to have us leave quickly, for fear we would be seen there."

"For fear you would be seen?" murmured Jack. "Why, didn't you want to be seen in Judge Bennett's office?"

"It was because we went there to get——" began Miss Manacca, but she was interrupted by a series of yells from the motor room of the yacht.

"Hi! Hi! Come quick, somebody! Budge

done got cotched in dish yeah contraption dat's goin' 'round an' 'round laik a coffee grinder!" shouted the voice of Skeleton, the colored cook. "Come quick, everybody!"

"Budge caught in the machinery!" cried Jack, springing for the companionway.

"Help! Help!" yelled the odd lad, this time his voice not being impeded by any gum.

"Quick! Quick!" implored Skeleton.

Jack rushed down the steps, glancing back at Miss Manacca to note that she had sunk, white and trembling, into a steamer chair. Sam, Bony and Nat hurried from the main cabin with Captain Reeger. The two machinists were forward, making some repairs to the anchor winch.

"What's the matter?" cried Sam.

"Budge is hurt," answered Jack.

He threw open the door leading to the compartment where the motor was located. Mingled with the cries now came a curious pounding and jarring of the machinery. The yacht seemed to be losing speed.

"Hurry up, or I'm a goner!" begged Budge.

"Quick, or dish year contraption'll make mince-meat ob him!" added Skeleton.

A moment later Jack and the others saw that which made them gasp with horror. Budge was standing in front of the still quickly-revolving motor, though its speed had considerably slack-

ened, and he was slowly being drawn in toward the big, heavy fly wheel and cogs that worked the pump and oiling systems.

The lad wore a long, loose apron, for he had been helping Skeleton in the galley. This apron had caught in the wheel, and was being wound up around the shaft, pulling Budge slowly, but with irresistible force, into the machinery. The stout cloth of the apron would not give, and Budge had tied it in such a hard knot behind that he could not loosen it.

"Hold back! Hold back!" implored Jack. "Break away, Budge!"

"I can't! I can't move!" he answered.

"Brace with your hands, and push back!" advised Nat.

"I can't do that, either. If I put out my hands they'll be chewed off in the wheels!"

"Shut off the power!" yelled Captain Reeger. "Turn that stop cock, and shove over that lever, Jack," for Jack was the nearest person to the controlling devices of the motor.

Jack reached forward to do so, but, at that instant, there was a snapping sound, and the rod that operated the pump, which circulated the water in the cylinders, cracked because of the unusual strain. Then, like some big arm of steel, the rod went flying about the motor room, being still connected by one end to the eccentric shaft.

To approach it meant to risk death, for it was flinging itself about, just in front of the controlling levers and valves. Budge, being farther back, was out of harm's way, but no one could approach to shut off the motor. And, in a short time, the unfortunate lad would be drawn into the mass of wheels and gears, which, though they were laboring to overcome the friction caused by the winding about the shaft of Budge's apron, were still moving swiftly.

The two machinists came below on the run. Jack had drawn back when he saw the threshing pump-rod, but only for a moment. The next instant he caught up a heavy iron bar, and exclaimed:

"I'm going to save Budge's life!"

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE LIGHTNING FLASH

FOR a few seconds those in the motor room did not comprehend Jack's plan. With the heavy bar raised above his head, he crept forward, crouching down low to avoid the flinging arm that was like a big flail. Then Nat found his voice.

"What are you going to do?" he gasped.

"I'm going to stop that motor," answered Jack grimly.

"But you can't! You'll be killed! Come back!" commanded Captain Reeger. "Maybe we can get a long pole, and shove over the cut-off lever."

"By that time it will be too late," replied Jack. "I'll do it my way."

The others watched him, fascinated. Slowly he crept forward until he was near enough to thrust the bar he carried right in the path of the pump rod. There was a clash and clang of metals, a ringing sound as if a bell had been struck. Then there came a vicious snap, and a piece of the pump rod went sailing through a port hole, splintering the heavy glass as if it was but a window pane in a doll's house.

"There!" cried Jack in triumph, as he sprang forward. He had accomplished what he set out to do—the pump rod was no longer threshing around, for it had been broken off short, by striking against the heavy bar which the lad thrust forward for that very purpose. There was no longer any danger in approaching to shut off the motor. An instant later Jack had done this, and the wheels ceased revolving.

Nor was it a moment too soon. Already Budge had been drawn so close that his clothing, together with the apron, was beginning to be wound up around the shaft.

"It's—it's—all——" began the odd youth, and then his face went suddenly white, and he slumped forward in a heap on top of the motor.

"Oh, he's—he's dead—killed!" moaned Bony, cracking his knuckles loudly.

"Not a bit of it! Only fainted!" asserted Jack. "Here, some of you help me cut him loose." Jack whipped out his knife, and Sam followed his example. There was little use in attempting to untangle the cloth from the shaft. It was cut, thus freeing Budge; and, still unconscious from the pressure about his waist, he was carried up on deck, where the fresh air would revive him.

"Oh, is he—dead?" gasped Miss Manacca, who had been joined by her colored attendant, and the two of them shrank back.

"Only fainted," announced Jack cheerfully. "He'll be all right in a minute or two."

"I have some strong smelling salts," went on the girl. She held a bottle of the volatile stuff beneath the nose of Budge Rankin. He breathed more strongly, sniffed once or twice, and then turned his head away, his eyes partly opening.

"He's coming around," announced Captain Reeger.

Budge opened his eyes fully. Miss Manacca held the bottle closer to his nose. Budge gave a violent start, and sat up.

"Who hit me?" he demanded, for indeed the ammonia, which was the chief ingredient of the smelling salts, gave the impression that a sudden jar had been administered.

"No one hit you," answered Jack, who was supporting his friend. "But you had a narrow escape, old man. You were tangled up in the motor."

Budge looked down at his torn clothes. Then he gazed at the circle of faces around him. He opened his mouth and spoke:

"Has any one got any gum?" he asked.

"Petrified perambulators!" gasped Nat. "You are the limit, Budge! Are you hurt?"

"Not much, I guess," was his answer, as he gratefully accepted some gum Bony held out. Breath was gone—that's all. I'm all right now."

"How did it happen?" asked Jack.

"I was watching the motor," explained Budge. "Skeleton bet me I couldn't count how fast it went around, and I said I could. There was no one in the place, so we went in from the galley. I was putting my finger on the fly wheel, to see how fast it went, when a puff of wind blew my apron into the shaft. 'NthereIwas," concluded Budge, beginning to chew the gum.

"Well, you'd better not do it again," said Captain Reeger, a bit severely. "No telling what damage you've done."

"It's not much, sir," reported Jensen, who came on deck then. "Hanson and I have got most of the cloth from off the shaft, and we have a spare pump rod. We'll be under way again in about two hours."

"But don't you try it again, Budge," warned Jack.

"Nope. I'll be 'anged' f I do."

"You'll be worse than hanged," predicted Sam grimly. "You, too, Skeleton."

"I 'clar' t' goodness-gladness I ain't nebber goin' in dat engin room ag'in," promised Skeleton earnestly.

Budge was soon himself again, and went below to get on some other garments. Meanwhile the two machinists were busy over the disabled motor, and the *Sea Bird* lay to, lazily slumping about on the sea, which, fortunately, was very calm.

"Well, that was some excitement," remarked Jack, as he went back to join Miss Manacca.

"And it might have been worse, if it had not been for your brave act in breaking the pump rod," she rejoined, for she had heard the story from Sam and Nat, and it lost nothing in their rendering of it.

"Oh, any one could have done what I did," said Jack, modestly.

"But no one did," she replied, her eyes sparkling.

They conversed for some time longer, and then, as the machinists needed some help in lifting off and replacing the heavy fly wheel, Jack and the other boys went below to bear a hand.

It was nearly twice Jensen's estimate of two hours before they were under way again, and, by this time, it had gotten quite dark. But with lighted lamps the *Sea Bird* was soon skimming over the waves again, once more headed for Porto Rico.

"And none too soon," declared Captain Reeger, as he stood at the wheel.

"Why?" asked Jack.

"Because we're in for another storm, though not a bad one. I like to be moving when the sea kicks up a fuss."

The storm seemed slow in making up its mind what to do. The fog had blown away some time

since, and now, off to the west, there were fitful flashes of lightning, forked tongues of pale fire, varied now and then with great sheets of flame that seemed to shoot from the horizon to the zenith. The wind was moaning and sobbing in the rigging, and there was a slow, uneasy heave to the sea and an oiliness to the water that gave it an unpleasant appearance.

"I guess it's going to be nothing but a thunder shower," said Jack to Miss Manacca, who had come up on the after deck, at the close of the evening meal.

"I hope it will not be very severe," she ventured. "We will be somewhat delayed getting to Porto Rico, I fear. I mean because of the accident this afternoon. Poor Budge, as you call him. Is he all right?"

"Oh, yes. As chipper as ever, and chewing gum as fast as possible."

There came a rather awkward silence. Jack was thinking of many things, but there was one question he wanted to ask the girl. He nerved himself to put it.

As the *Sea Bird* shot forward, now over a sea as black as ink, and again on top of the lightning-illuminated waves, Jack said to her:

"We were talking of matters in Judge Bennett's office, Miss Manacca, just before Budge met with his mishap."

"Yes," she assented, and there was a frightened note in her voice.

"I suppose it's rather impudent of me to ask," went on our hero, "but I would like very much to know why you were there. Do you mind telling?"

There was a moment's pause. Then her answer came, as coolly and as calmly as if he had asked her to dance with him.

"I don't in the least mind telling you. I went there with my brother to sign some papers so that we might obtain the inheritance of which we had tried so long to get possession. It was merely to have Mr. Caleb—Mr. Caleb——"

"Herkimer——" supplied Jack.

"Yes, it was to have Mr. Herkimer witness my signature and that of my brother. And it was then that I lost my hatpin."

The answer, so different from what Jack had expected—which put so different a face on the whole mystery—startled him. He was about to reply, when the girl sprang to her feet with a cry of warning, and pointed to the port rail.

There, in a flash of lightning, was revealed another vessel, and one so close that it was a wonder that the *Sea Bird* had not run her down, for she displayed no lights.

"Look out! Port! Port your helm!" cried Jack to Captain Reeger. But the commander had

already seen the danger, and had shifted the wheel, while the motor room telegraph jangled out a command to reverse the engine. The single lightning flash that had revealed the presence of the other vessel was followed by a broad sheet of aerial fire. In the glare of it Jack looked at the mysterious craft. It was slipping by, hardly five cable lengths away.

"The *Annabell*—the former *Dolphin*!" murmured Jack. "Is she following us—or we her? No lights—why has she no lights?"

The flash lasted long enough for him to see the man at the wheel, and at the sight of him Jack uttered another half-articulate cry. For the steersman was none other than the Spaniard, Manacca.

An instant later the girl at Jack's side had rushed to the rail. Holding out her hands toward the other vessel, that had been swallowed up in the darkness, she cried:

"Loy! Loy! Oh, Loy!"

There was no answer. The next flash showed the vessel far off, for it was moving swiftly. Miss Manacca turned excitedly to Jack.

"My brother was on that ship!" she cried, and then she fell in a faint on deck, while from the storm-clouds overhead came a deluge of rain.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT PORTO RICO

JACK sprang to the aid of the prostrate girl, and managed to lift her into the low steamer chair. Her faint was but momentary, and she was soon herself again. A dash of rain in her face further revived her.

"Did you—did you see him?" she gasped to Jack. "My—my brother! Oh, I forgot, you do not know him. But he was on that ship! I saw him."

"Yes, yes," spoke Jack, soothingly. "But you had better come below. Shall I call Musa?"

"No, I am all right. It was silly of me to faint. But the sight of my brother startled me. Can we overtake that vessel?"

"I'm afraid not," answered our hero. "They were going very fast, and—they seem to want to remain hidden." He gazed off across the dark and rain-swept ocean. The lightning had ceased for a time, and not a glimpse could be had of the mysterious yacht. She was swallowed up in the blackness of the night.

"Why—why do they want to remain concealed?" asked the girl. "What does it mean?"

What could Jack tell her? Could he say that he believed that it was because of some mystery connected with his box of treasure—the treasure he had suspected her of taking? The treasure of which her brother might know something, and which Jack felt sure that Caleb Herkimer had? No. It was no time for such an admission. And yet the treasure box might be aboard the vessel which had slipped away so mysteriously in the darkness. Clearly those on board had some object in keeping in the shadows.

"Did you see that?" called Captain Reeger to Jack. "In another minute we'd have run them down. The idiots! To go about without showing lights. They ought to be reported. Could you make out the name?"

"I'll see you later," answered Jack. "I'm helping Miss Manacca to get below. She doesn't feel very well." He had his own reasons for not telling Captain Reeger all he had seen in the lightning flash—at least he did not want to tell him now. Jack had a few problems to work out by himself.

"Oh, I'm all right," protested the girl, but, as the rain was beating in under the awning Jack insisted that she go below, and, as the yacht was beginning to pitch and toss, he gave her his arm.

She was eager to question Jack, but the cabin was occupied by Sam, Nat and Bony, who were deep in a game of dominoes, and it was no place for confidences.

"What was the row up on deck?" asked Sam, trying to get a double blank from the "bone-yard."

"Nearly ran into some other yacht," answered Jack, carelessly.

Miss Manacca retired to her stateroom, and, a little later, the boys also turned in, for they had been tired by their work over the disabled engine. Budge was all right, save for a soreness about the wrist.

The next day was beautiful, the storm having cleared the atmosphere. The air was warm and balmy, for they were now well to the south.

Captain Reeger was gazing through a powerful telescope toward what seemed a slight haze on the horizon.

"Well, our voyage will soon be over," he said to Jack. "At least the first part of it. Then you can begin your hunt on shore for your treasure box, Jack."

"Hush!" exclaimed the lad, and he glanced toward Miss Manacca, who was reading a book, seated in a steamer chair on the after deck. She had not heard, seemingly.

"Oh, I forgot you don't want her to know," went on the captain.

"But why do you say we are near the end?" asked Jack.

"Because that haze over there is Cuba," was the response.

Miss Manacca caught the words.

"Cuba!" she cried. "Oh, then we will soon be home! Let me look, please!"

She came forward, and Jack held the glass for her.

"It doesn't look much like Cuba," she protested.

"No, it is a bit too far off," said the captain, "but that is Cuba, just the same. We won't get much nearer her than this, as I'm now going to head directly for Porto Rico."

Jack followed the girl back to the after deck.

"I want to ask you something, Mr. Ranger," she began, in a quiet voice.

"What is it?" he inquired, his heart strangely beating. He felt that her question would have to do with the mystery.

"Do you know why my brother was on that yacht, and why they should sail about with no lights?" she asked, looking directly at him.

Jack felt his face growing warm. What could he say? He made up his mind that he would not tell the whole truth—that he was beginning to suspect her brother—he could not do that, for he had too high a regard for the girl, for whom, in

the last two weeks, he had begun to feel a strange liking. Yet he must answer.

"Miss Manacca," he said, a bit solemnly, "I can't tell you all I might, for as you may have suspected, I am on my way to Porto Rico on a serious affair. I am after a scoundrel—a thief, and, aboard that vessel are other scoundrels and thieves who, I think, are seeking to do me harm. That is why they go about in the dark—because they don't want to be traced."

"Scoundrels and thieves?" echoed the girl, shrinking back. "And my brother is with them!"

"Perhaps he does not know their true character," suggested Jack. "He may have taken the first vessel he could get to Porto Rico, and they may have been on board," yet, even as he spoke, he could not reconcile the presence of Manacca together with Lavine and Chowden on the *Dolphin*, especially when he remembered that Manacca was to have sailed with "friends."

"I—I can't understand it," said the girl, wearily, passing her hand over her eyes. "I—I am beginning to—to be afraid," and she fled from the deck, and went to her stateroom.

They sighted Porto Rico a few days later, though it was not all smooth sailing, for they ran into a bad storm that lasted a day and night. Miss Manacca did not again appear on deck, and Jack did not know what to think. But he had

many other matters with which to occupy his mind. He was busy in his stateroom, getting in shape some papers which he was to present to the authorities of San Juan, where they would dock. These documents included copies of Mr. Ranger's title to the Fernandez box, letters from Judge Bennett, and from the police of New York, which last Detective Tyler had obtained, and other papers, showing the nature of Jack's quest.

"We'll dock in half an hour," announced Captain Reeger, as he stood at the wheel, taking observations. "And I must say that our trip, thus far, has been successful."

On sped the *Sea Bird*. Those on board crowded to the rail, watching San Juan as it loomed up on the little point of land on which it is located. Every moment the island city became more distinct. Miss Manacca was below, packing, Jack thought, and her colored attendant was with her. Our hero had run up from his stateroom on a call from Nat, to look at the harbor. He left his papers on his dresser.

Jack did not go below again until the yacht was fast to a dock. Then he thought of his scattered documents, and hurried down to collect them. They were neatly piled on his dresser, and on top was a weight.

"I never put that there," murmured Jack. "They must have started to blow around, and

some one caught them. I'm glad they did. But we're here, at any rate, and I must tell Miss Manacca. She'll be anxious. I wonder if that other vessel reached here ahead of us?"

He walked to the girl's stateroom, intending to knock, and invite her on deck. To his surprise the room was wide open, and empty. All the belongings of the Spanish girl had been removed.

Much surprised, Jack stepped to the next room—that of Musa, the nurse. That was also vacant.

"They must have gone up the after companion-way, and I missed them," he murmured. "They're probably on deck."

Once more he looked into the little room, so lately occupied by the girl. A note on the dresser caught his attention. He looked. It was addressed to him, in a foreign hand. He opened it. The few words it contained were quickly read.

"MR. RANGER," it began, without preface. "Accidentally just now I saw some papers that blew from your stateroom. I picked them up and returned them, but I could not help seeing that, by them, you are seeking to recover the Ferandez box. That box of treasure belongs to my brother and to me! We have long sought it! It is only our enemies who seek to keep it from us. Once I overheard, in the cabin, your talk of some treas-

ure, and I suspected it might be ours. The thought frightened me, and I did not want to see you again. Then I concluded I was mistaken. Now I know that you are after the Fernandez box—my treasure. You shall never have it! But I cannot forget that you saved my life. I almost wish you had not.

LOLA FERNANDEZ."

"Lola Fernandez!" gasped Jack. "So that's what those initials L. F. stood for. She went under a false name."

He read the note again, and then crushed it into his pocket.

"The Fernandez box hers!" he murmured. "I must get to the bottom of this."

He rushed up on deck. His chums were about to go ashore, for the gangplank had been run out.

"I say!" began Jack. "Have any of you seen Miss Fernan—, I mean Miss Manacca?"

"Miss Manacca?" repeated Nat. "Why, she and her nurse went ashore five minutes ago. We thought she said good-bye to you down below," and he grinned.

"Gone ashore!" exclaimed Jack. The girl had evidently fled from him. She did not want to meet him. "Gone ashore," he repeated under his breath. "She considers me her enemy—and yet—she says she cannot forget that I saved her life. What will happen next?"

CHAPTER XXIV

HEMP SMITH

JACK's astonishment at the unexpected disappearance of the girl and her colored attendant was short-lived, at least for the time being. For the arrival of the *Sea Bird* at San Juan was the signal for a swarm of natives to gather about the dock, offering all sorts of things for sale, souvenirs, sea shells, and articles of food of more or less desirability; and such a babel of tongues, such confusion from men who wished to be hired to work, such shouting from the dock officials, arose, that there was little opportunity for Jack and his chums to do anything but look on in wonder.

"Mercerized mackerel!" exclaimed Nat. "Who'd have thought this was such a busy place!"

"It's great," declared Sam. "I'm glad we came. Now if we can go ashore, Jack, and pick up your treasure box——"

"Hush!" exclaimed the owner of the stolen chest. "We must go about it a little more quietly, Sam."

"Any way so as to get it—that's my motto!" remarked Bony, who was at his favorite occupation of knuckle-cracking.

"When can we go ashore, Captain Reeger?" asked Jack. "I am anxious to see if those fellows have arrived yet."

"I guess we can go right away," was the answer. "I have my papers all ready for the authorities, and you can begin your inquiries of the police as soon as you like. In fact some members of our party have already gone ashore. Miss Manacca told me to tell you that she had had a most delightful trip."

"Yes," answered Jack, non-committally. He felt a little hurt at the girl's conduct, but he did not want to show it. "Well, suppose we all try how it seems to walk on solid ground once more. I don't see anything of the *Dolphin*, alias *Annabell*, in port," and our hero looked around at the various vessels tied to docks.

"Oh, she might be here and we not see her," said Sam. "But we'll soon find out."

On shore they were surrounded by a crowd of dusky Porto Ricans, all eager to get some of the "Americano" gold. The boys bought some souvenirs, which, in a measure, relieved them from the importunities of the throng, and then, with Captain Reeger, they hurried on to the office of the harbor master. There the commander filed the necessary papers, and, finding an official who spoke some English, he inquired for the *Dolphin*.

"She must have arrived recently," said the cap-

tain, "for, though she was faster than our boat, she could not get here very much in advance of us."

"She no here," was the reply, after the officer had looked over his books. "*Dolphin* or *Annabell*, whichever you like to call her, Señor, she no have come."

"Not here!" cried Jack. "But I thought——"

"Go easy," advised Captain Reeger, in a low voice. "News travels fast in a place like this, and you don't want to give your business away in advance. The vessel with those fellows on board may have landed at Ponce, or some other port on the island. This is not the only one."

"That's so," admitted Sam. "Then what's the matter with us driving across to Ponce? They say there's a fine road over the island. We can get horses, and on our way visit some of the caves for which this place is famous. Maybe we'll find a store of pirate gold, and then we'll all have treasure boxes, as well as Jack Ranger."

He had spoken rather loudly, and at his words there was a curious interchange of glances among several men in the office of the harbor master.

"Will you fellows keep quiet!" begged Jack. "First you know Hemp Smith, Lavine and Caleb Herkimer will know we're after them, and we can whistle for what we want."

"I guess they know it already," was Nat's opin-

ion. Jupiter's muskmelons! Didn't they see us from their boat? Of course they know we're after them. The thing to do is to catch them."

"Let's go to Ponce," suggested Bony. "I guess I can ride a horse."

"If the horse doesn't object to having such a scarecrow of a figure sit on his back," remarked Sam, taking care to get out of the reach of Bony's fist.

"Huh! I don't weigh as much as you, that's one consolation," retorted Bony.

"No, we'll not go to Ponce—right away," decided Jack. "That is, I won't. You fellows can do as you like."

"Why, we're here to help you," declared Nat, "but I should think it would be a good thing to go to Ponce. It's the only other big place, except San Juan, and most likely the *Dolphin* has put in there."

"Well, I'm not going—yet," murmured Jack.

"Ah! I see!" exclaimed Sam. "Miss Manacca lives there. She didn't say good-bye to Jack. What does that mean? Nothing else but a quarrel. See the game, fellows? Jack is miffed, and he won't——"

"Shut up!" cried Jack, more forcibly than politely. "Some of these men may understand English."

He did not deny what Sam had said, and, truth

to tell, that *was* one reason why Jack did not care to journey to Ponce. Another was that he wanted to make further inquiries at San Juan.

They left the office of the harbor master, and, at the captain's suggestion, next visited the police authorities. Jack and Nat went on this errand, as it was thought best to avoid the confusion of a large party. Armed with his letters of introduction, and documents concerning the treasure box, Jack was ushered in to see the chief of police.

That official was very polite, and also very anxious to help.

"But, you know," he said, with a smile, "things move slowly down here. It will probably be several days before I have any news for you."

Jack had expected this, and, knowing the habits engendered by a long Spanish rule, he prepared himself for delay.

For a week the treasure-seekers remained in San Juan. At the end of that time the police head announced that, as far as he was able to learn, the *Dolphin*, or any vessel corresponding to her description, had not landed on the island. Nor was there any trace of Caleb Herkimer, the treasure box, or anything connected with it.

"What about Mr. Manacca?" asked Jack, as a sort of last hope.

"Ah, Señor Manacca! Well, the best way to find out about him would be to go to Ponce.

where he lives," advised the chief. "We do not know him here—at least by that name."

Then Jack decided that his objection to going to the place where he might meet Miss Manacca was not to be considered.

"We start for Ponce in the morning," he announced to his chums, that afternoon, as they went on board the *Sea Bird*.

"Then ho! for the pirates' caves, and the wonderful bags of gold!" cried Sam.

Horses were secured early the next morning, and the trip across the island was begun. There was a fine highway from San Juan to Ponce, and along this the four boys took their course. Captain Reeger, Budge and the others remained on board the yacht. It was about forty miles from San Juan to Ponce in a direct line, but longer by way of the good roads, so the boys decided to take two days to the trip, stopping to visit some of the caves.

The trip was enjoyable, in spite of the fact that Jack was worried over his treasure box. They went up into the mountains, and spent some time in the caverns, of which there were a number. They passed the night in the city of Barros, and enjoyed the scenes incidental to a native holiday. Early the following morning they were on their way again.

In Ponce, Jack visited the police, having a letter

from the chief in San Juan. He was offered every courtesy and facility, and an inquiry was at once started. The boys put up at a good hotel, and they were just sitting down to dinner when a messenger arrived with a note for Jack. It was from the police, and read:

"Señor Manacca has not been at home in some time. His sister and her attendant recently arrived from the United States, but Señor Manacca or, to give his full name, Señor Manacca-Fernandez, is not at home. Nor is there any record in this city of the vessel *Dolphin* having put into any port around here. Neither is there any trace of the other persons of whom Señor Ranger has been pleased to make inquiries."

The police official, after signing himself a most obedient servant, and offering to do anything else in his power, closed his note with thanks for having had the privilege of helping the Americans.

"Not here," murmured Jack. "I can't understand it."

"And no trace of Caleb Herkimer!" added Nat. "Maybe he never sailed for this place at all!"

"Maybe," assented Jack, listlessly, reading the note again. He was puzzled over the non-arrival of Miss Manacca's brother, or, to give her the name she claimed, Miss Fernandez. And he was

now almost sure that the Spaniard, not Herkimer, had the box.

Jack had not read to his companions the portion of the note referring to the change of name. He wanted to think about that part of the mystery a little longer. What was the girl's object in sailing under false colors at the first, and, later, telling her right name? Yet, according to the police, she had a right to both, for, like many other Spanish families, her last name was a double one. Jack shook his head.

"Well, we won't give up yet," he said. "We'll stay here a week, and see what turns up. Then we'll go back to San Juan."

This program was carried out. They remained at the hotel, but could get no further trace of the treasure box, nor those suspected of taking it. Jack set on foot some private inquiries regarding the Manacca-Fernandez family. He found that they were of ancient and honorable lineage, and, though poor, were much respected. He also learned that Miss Manacca-Fernandez was at home, and that she was much worried over the non-arrival of her brother.

"Maybe the *Dolphin* has sunk!" thought Jack, when this news was brought to him. "She was likely to, the way they ran her after dark without lights. That would explain everything—their non-arrival here, and—but my treasure box! If it

was on board, as I believe, it may be at the bottom of the sea now! Though if Caleb Herkimer took it, and sailed with it before the *Dolphin* did, that can hardly be. By Jove! where am I at, anyhow?" and he rumbled up his hair, which he always did when he had any hard thinking to do.

But all his hard thinking this time seemed to lead to nothing. It was like working in the dark. Then, after a fruitless week in Ponce, Jack and his chums returned to San Juan. There was no news there.

It was one evening when the party had been in Porto Rico about three weeks, during which time they had heard nothing that would lead to the recovery of the treasure box, that Jack and his chums went ashore to stroll about. It was a beautiful moonlit night, and ashore were gay parties of natives and foreigners, listening to a marine band, or wandering about listlessly wherever there was a breeze.

"It's nice here," observed Jack, "but there isn't any use hanging around longer. I guess I might as well give up the hunt, and go back. I'm afraid my treasure box is gone for good."

"It's mighty queer," spoke Sam, "that we can't get any trace of that fellow Herkimer, or Jerry Chowden and any of his crowd.

"It sure is," agreed Nat. "Maybe they're back

in New York. They say that's a good place to hide. It's so big."

"Well, we'll look about a bit longer here," decided Jack, "and then——"

He did not finish what he was about to say. At that moment they came to a sort of open square, where a throng of people were gathered. In the centre, on a small, portable platform stood a man, and above his head was a flaring gasoline torch. He was talking in poor Spanish, lapsing now and then into the jargon of a street faker.

"Selling celluloid collar buttons or patent medicine," observed Sam. "Let's go see what it is."

Jack Ranger pressed eagerly forward. He stared at the man under the torch. The fellow was shouting out the merits of his wares, which proved to be a powder for polishing silver.

"Look!" exclaimed Jack, in a low voice, to his chums. "Do you see who that is?"

"I can't," replied Nat. "The torch flickers so. None of our friends, I fancy."

"Not exactly a friend," spoke Jack, slowly, "but we know him."

"Who is it?" asked Sam,

"Hemp Smith, *alias* Marinello Booghoobally," was Jack's startling answer. "He's here on the job, and if *he's* here the rest can't be far off. Fellows, we're on some sort of a trail at last!"

CHAPTER XXV

TWO ODD LETTERS

FOR a moment after Jack had made his startling announcement, none of his companions spoke. They gazed at the faker, who was pattering away, disposing of some boxes of his powder to the gullible Porto Ricans. He kept up a running fire of talk, now in English and now in Spanish, for he had managed to pick up a smattering of the latter language.

"It's Smith, all right," agreed Nat. "Wobbling whangdoodles! What'll we do about it?"

"Let's call an officer, and have him arrested," suggested Bony, cracking his finger joints like miniature revolvers.

"No," said Jack quickly.

"Why not?" Sam wanted to know. "If we have him locked up he'll tell where Herkimer and the others are, and we'll find out what has become of your box."

"No," answered Jack, shaking his head. "In the first place, we can't have him locked up. At best we have but a suspicion against him, and it would be hard to explain that to one of the police

here. Again, if we raised a row Hemp Smith would light out, and we might not set eyes on him again."

"Then what are you going to do?" asked Nat.

"Keep watch on him," was the answer. "We'll wait here, and see what he does, and when he leaves we'll follow him. He can't see us in this crowd. It's our best chance. We'll trail him, Nat; you and I. The rest of you go back to the ship, when we start out."

"Aren't you afraid to tackle him alone?" asked Sam.

"Not a bit of it," was Jack's answer. "I've had a run-in with Hemp before, and I'm not at all frightened of him."

"He's an ugly customer," ventured Nat.

"If you're afraid——" began Jack.

"Of course not," answered Nat quickly.

They remained hidden in the crowd for some little time longer. Hemp Smith found the Porto Ricans "easy marks," as he would have expressed it, and he succeeded in selling nearly all of his supply of comparatively worthless silver polish, ere the throng began to melt away. Then, realizing that business was over for the night, Hemp extinguished the torch, folded up his platform, packed up his wares, and loaded them on a small hand cart. Pushing this before him, he went off down the street.

"Now's our chance," said Jack to Nat. "We'll take after him. Sam, you and Bony go back, and, if we don't show up in a reasonable time, notify the police. We may get into trouble with Hemp, but I don't believe so."

"Be careful," urged Sam, as the two lads started off to shadow the rascal who, more than once, had tried his best to injure Jack Ranger.

The man did not seem at all suspicious that he was being followed, and the comparative darkness of the streets aided Jack and Nat in their trailing.

"How do you suppose he got here?" asked Nat. "The *Dolphin* couldn't have arrived, or the police would have notified us."

"Maybe he came in a small boat," suggested Jack. "Possibly from some island near here. There are a number of them. But don't speak aloud. It's so quiet that sound carries a long distance, and a word in English may alarm him. We'll just follow."

They did, for more than half an hour. Hemp Smith turned his steps toward a poorer part of the town, and, wending his way amid the pedestrians, which now became fewer and fewer, he suddenly came to a stop in front of a small hotel and restaurant. His cart he left in an alley outside, then he entered. Jack and Nat remained in the shadows of the wall.

"Well?" asked Nat, after a pause.

"I'm going in," decided Jack. "I want to have a talk with him. I think he'll tell what I want to know, if he thinks I might have him arrested."

"Suppose he shows fight?"

"I don't believe he will, in view of what we know of his past."

The place was not very inviting, but Jack and Nat did not mind this. They were intent on finding Hemp Smith. Though they had entered not three minutes after him, he was nowhere in sight, but a few words of explanation, to a man who seemed to be a sort of clerk, and a sight of a general letter of introduction, which Jack had from the Porto Rican police, worked wonders.

"Yes, the Señor inquired about is stopping here, but his name is not Smith," said the clerk.

"No matter," replied Jack. "He's the man we want. We'll go to his room."

"Of a certainty, yes," answered the clerk, with a low bow. "The Señors Americanos are welcome to go anywhere. The entire place is at their disposal."

"Wouldn't have it for a gift," murmured Nat, as he and Jack made their way through the dirty halls.

They knocked on the door of the room which a ragged boy indicated as belonging to the man they sought.

"Who's there?" came in startled tones from Hemp.

"I wish to see you," spoke Jack. There was a movement in the room, a hurried walking about, and the door was opened. A glance showed that Hemp had evidently been making more silver polish, for small boxes were all about, and there was a white dust visible on the scanty furniture.

"What do you want?" began the faker, angrily, and then he happened to catch a glimpse of the faces of Nat and Jack. He jumped back, and was about to close the door, only Jack put his foot in the opening and prevented this.

"We want to have a talk with you, Hemp Smith," said our hero, sternly.

"Hemp Smith? I'm not Hemp——"

"That'll do you!" interrupted Jack. "We know you. There's no use beating about the bush! We know enough to send you to prison for a long term. In fact that's where you belong, and I don't see how you got out. But that's neither here nor there, now. If you answer a few questions it will be all right. If not——"

He paused significantly.

"What do you want to know?" growled the faker.

"First, we'll come inside and sit down," went on Jack, coolly. "We don't want every one to know our business," and he and Nat entered, seat-

ing themselves on the cleanest chairs in the room.

"We want to know, first, what became of Señor Manacca-Fernandez," said Jack, suddenly, "and also where Jerry Chowden and Jonas Lavine are. After you tell me that you might tell where my treasure box is!"

Hemp Smith started.

"Your treasure box?" he repeated, with the accent on the "your."

"Yes, *mine!*" declared Jack.

"I don't know anything about *your* treasure box," said Hemp.

"Where is Caleb Herkimer?" asked Nat.

"I never met the gentleman, so far as I know," was the reply, in Hemp's former style of a person of quality.

"We know better!" snapped Jack.

"Then if you do, you know more than I do," was Hemp's cool reply.

"Look here!" burst out Jack. "This won't do. I saw you on the yacht *Dolphin*, which was re-christened the *Annabell* when she was at sea, in violation of the law. We also saw Jerry and the others, as well as Señor Manacca-Fernandez. Now you might as well own up."

"All right," and Hemp Smith grinned maliciously. "I see you are on to part of the game, but it don't worry me, for I'm out of it. I did sail with Lavine and Chowden, but only because

I wanted to get to Porto Rico. I'm going to start a business here."

"Yes, a hot business you'll start," murmured Nat.

"That's all I know about them," resumed Hemp. "I never saw Herkimer. As for that Spanish gentleman, he also was on board, but only as a passenger like myself."

"Where is he now?" asked Jack, eagerly; "and where is the treasure box he had?"

"He didn't have any, as far as I know," said Hemp, and he seemed to be speaking the truth. "As for where he is now, you know as much as I do. He went ashore one night, when we had made a landing, and I haven't seen him since."

"How about Caleb Herkimer?" asked Nat, thinking to trap the faker.

"I never saw, nor heard of him before," declared Hemp, and once more he seemed to be telling the truth.

"Then where is the *Dolphin*?" demanded Jack.

"Ah, now you're talking," came from Hemp, and he grinned again. "Well, I can't tell you."

"You mean you won't."

"Put it that way if you like, but there's nothing doing along that line. My friends Chowden and Lavine didn't want me to talk about their business any more than I'd want them to talk about mine. I'm not going to, either."

"How'd you get here?" asked Nat, hoping to surprise the rascal into an answer.

"By boat," was the quick reply. Obviously it was true. It was the only way to reach the island.

"Then you didn't come in the *Dolphin*," said Jack, for close watch had been kept on the shipping.

"Well, I'm here, anyhow," retorted Hemp; "and now, if it's all the same to you I'd like to get to work, if you are through taking up room here, and asking me impertinent questions," and he assumed an ugly air.

"Then you refuse to tell where the *Dolphin* and her passengers are?" asked Jack. "Be careful, for you are still liable to arrest on several charges."

"I'm not afraid of you!" burst out the faker. "This place is too far from the United States to cause me any worry. I'm not going to tell you another thing! Now you'd better get out. I have to make some silver polish to sell to-morrow."

There was defiance in his manner. Jack and Nat thought it would do little good to question him further, and they left. They heard Hemp Smith laughing as he closed the door on them.

"Not much satisfaction out of him," murmured Nat.

"No, hang him!" agreed Jack, dubiously.

"Oh, he'll hang soon enough, or be electrocuted

if he keeps on," added his chum. "Come on, let's get back to the yacht."

They found their friends a little anxious about them, as it was long past midnight, and they had been away for some time. Sam was about to organize a relief expedition, when the two walked up the gangplank.

"What luck?" called Bony.

"Pretty poor," rejoined Jack, and soon he was telling the story of the talk with Hemp Smith.

"Maybe if we put the screws on he'd sing a different tune," suggested Captain Reeger.

"How do you mean?" asked Jack.

"Have the police lock him up," went on the commander. "It could be done, on suspicion, if not on some of the old charges."

"I'll think about it," answered Jack. "I'm going to bed now, for I'm dead tired."

He turned in, vaguely wondering if he would ever see his treasure again. The chase began to look hopeless.

The morning broke in a dull fog, with a promise of a storm in the falling barometer. Budge Rankin went ashore for the mail, and came back with several letters. There were two for Jack, and both bore San Juan postmarks, while one had evidently been mailed in Ponce.

"I should know that writing," murmured our hero, as he glanced at one letter, addressed in a

feminine hand. "It looks like the note Miss Manacca-Fernandez left for me." Quickly he tore open the envelope. He read the few words at a glance, and a cry of astonishment escaped him. For his eyes took in this:

"SEÑOR RANGER: I do not know how to write this to you, but I must. I have greatly wronged you. It is your treasure box after all. It does not belong to us. There has been some terrible mistake. I pray you not to prosecute my brother, but he has your box. If you will proceed to a small island, known as 'Cavern Island,' which is not far from Vieques Island, off the eastern point of Porto Rico, you will there find your treasure, in a cave. My brother has it there. He has been betrayed and deserted, and I have just learned of his whereabouts. Forgive my conduct toward you. It was a great mistake. Please forgive my brother. He thought he was doing right. I am broken-hearted.

"LOLA MANACCA-FERNANDEZ."

"Whew!" whistled Jack. "Worse and more of it! On the track of my treasure box at last! Hurrah! Now for Cavern Island!"

Then he bethought himself of the other letter. It was obviously in a man's handwriting, and was rather soiled, as if it had been carried in some

one's pocket for a time. Jack ripped it open. It was read at a glance.

"JACK RANGER: If you want your treasure box back, and will pay \$1,000 for it, you may have it. If you wish to enter into negotiations with me, send a line to me in care of Señor Raphael Dupoy, San Juan, saying you will pay the money. I will then return the box to you."

"Wow! Another offer!" murmured Jack, and, when his eyes took in the signature, he uttered another exclamation, for the second letter was signed by Caleb Herkimer!

CHAPTER XXVI

OFF FOR CAVERN ISLAND

"SAY, fellows, look here!" cried Jack, as soon as he had finished reading the two odd letters. "Here's something doing!" and he gave them the contents of both, rapidly.

"Solidified sunbeams!" ejaculated Nat, "things *are* happening with a vengeance, Jack. Washington Hall isn't in it, with this yachting cruise. Two offers of your treasure box in one mail. Are there any more letters, Budge? Maybe there's a box for each of us."

"SallIave," announced Budge, chewing his gum.

"No more, eh?" from Sam. "Well, now we'll help Jack unravel his mystery. What are you going to do, Jack?"

"Hanged if I know. This has got me going," and our hero scratched his head with a puzzled air. He then told his chums of the girl's double name.

"I'd take up with the offer of Miss Manacca-Fernandez," said Sam. "It's evident that she's telling the truth. But what does she mean by saying it's a mistake?"

"I don't know," answered Jack, "unless she intends to say that she and her brother thought my box was their box, and that he took it by mistake."

"Wasn't much mistake about it, I guess," remarked Nat. "I think it was a put-up job between those two Spanish people."

"You dry up!" commanded Jack. "Miss Manacca-Fernandez tells the truth!"

"Then why does she ask you not to prosecute her brother if it was a mistake?" asked Nat, in triumph.

"I don't know," and Jack shook his head. "Anyhow, I believe her."

"And you're going to set off for Cavern Island?" asked Captain Reeger.

"Let's find out what sort of a place it is," suggested Sam. "Maybe it's not safe to go to."

"What's the matter with taking up Caleb Herkimer's offer?" asked Bony. "He seems to know what he's talking about. Besides, I really think he took the box, together with the judge's money and papers. Maybe we can arrest him, Jack."

"Not much danger. He's too slick a customer," was Jack's opinion. "But I don't know what to do about his offer. I believe he did have my treasure box, but whether he has it now——"

"Or whether he stole it away from the Spanish brother and sister——" interrupted Nat, who

seemed to take delight in thus tormenting Jack.

His chum glared at him.

"I don't know what to think," went on our hero. "I guess Sam's suggestion is as good as any. First we'll find out something about Cavern Island. Then we'll consider the offer of Caleb Herkimer. But I think he's up to some game."

Information about Cavern Island was easy enough to obtain. It was a small and desolate bit of land in that part of the sea, and was distant about a hundred miles from Vieques Island, which latter lay about twenty miles off Cayo Batato, Porto Rico. There was fresh water to be obtained on Cavern Island, which took its name from the fact that there was a large cave on it. In fact that was about all the island was—a cave. Ships sometimes stopped there, but it was not a place in good repute, for it was frequently the abiding spot for criminals who escaped from Cuban and Porto Rican jails. Of late years, however, since United States rule in the islands, there had been no complaints from it, and the latest information was to the effect that no one was on the island.

"But we know differently," said Jack. "Miss Manacca-Fernandez says her brother is there with my treasure box. So I'm going there and get it."

"What about Herkimer?" asked Nat.

"I'll see what I can do with him, too," went on

Jack. "I'm going to get into communication with this Dupoy. He's evidently some tool for Herkimer."

A letter to Señor Raphael Dupoy brought a prompt response, and Jack was invited to call alone at a given address.

"If you bring any one with you, entrance will be denied," the letter stated. "But have no fear. My home is in the main part of the town, and the police are near at hand. You will come to no harm."

"I'm going and take a chance," decided Jack, though his chums endeavored to dissuade him. "Maybe Herkimer is there, and I can have it out with him."

"Will you pay the thousand dollars?" asked Nat.

"I'll see," replied Jack.

"Don't you do it," urged Sam. "If Herkimer offers you the box for that sum, it's because he's looted it. There's nothing in it now, I'll wager."

It was dark when Jack started off to keep his appointment with Señor Dupoy. He found the house was one of the better class, in a respectable part of the town, so he knew he had little to fear. There was a wait after his knock, and he felt that he was being scrutinized through some blind, or shutter. Then the door opened, and he was bidden to enter, by a pleasant-faced Spanish girl.

"Ah, Señor Ranger," spoke a stout Spaniard, a few minutes later, entering the room where Jack sat. "Have you brought the thousand dollars?" he asked, eagerly.

"Not just yet," was Jack's answer. "I wanted to find out more before I got the money. Besides, I have not that much cash available."

"Then we can do no business," was the cold answer. "You were told to bring a thousand dollars."

"I don't always do as I am told," was Jack's grim reply. "Is Caleb Herkimer here? Are you a friend of his? If you are, you might tell him that, sooner or later, he'll be arrested, not only for the theft of my box, but because of the money and papers he took from Judge Bennett."

"I can give you no information of Señor Herkimer," was the Spaniard's cold answer. "You must comply with the conditions of his letter. I merely agreed to serve him in this matter. You cannot see him. If you bring the money here, a certain box will be returned to you. That is all I am authorized to say."

"But will there be anything in the box?" asked Jack.

"I know not," was the Spaniard's reply. "I should think, though, that there would be in it all that there was when it was taken away. Of a surety, yes."

"I'm not buying pigs in pokes," murmured Jack.

"Ah, the Señor is pleased to call me a pig!" exclaimed the man, with an angry gesture.

"No, no!" exclaimed our hero, with a laugh. "I beg your pardon. I was merely reciting a proverb of my country. Well, I am sorry, but I cannot hand over a thousand dollars without some other assurance, than a mere guess, that I'll get what I'm paying for. It's too risky."

"As the Señor pleases," answered Dupoy. "I have the honor to bid you good evening, and I hope you will not regret your choice."

"But can't you tell me more about it?" exclaimed Jack. "Who has my box now? Where is Caleb Herkimer?"

"It is useless to question, Señor. I bid you good evening," and the Spaniard handed Jack his hat. It was equivalent to a dismissal. Somewhat angry, our hero arose. He felt that he could accomplish little by further talk. The time had come to act.

"Tell Caleb Herkimer," he said, purposely raising his voice so that the scoundrel, if he was in the place, might hear him, "tell him that he'll soon be in jail, and that I'll have my treasure box back without having to pay a cent."

"Ha! The Senor is pleased to joke," murmured Dupoy. "I have the honor, once more, to bid you good evening," and he bowed low and mockingly.

Jack slammed the door shut after him, and hurried down the street. So far his mission had been a failure.

"But we'll see what happens on Cavern Island," he said. "I believe the Spanish girl is telling the truth. I'll get my treasure box after all!"

The next morning the *Sea Bird* set sail for Cavern Island, her motor humming and throbbing, and the screw beating the waves to foam.

CHAPTER XXVII

HELPLESS AT SEA

"WELL, this is something like!" exclaimed Sam Chalmers, as he paced the deck of his uncle's yacht, and looked off across the calm ocean. "Great, isn't it, fellows?"

"Smoked sunflowers! I should say so!" exclaimed Nat. "It's the best ever. I'm hungry already. This sea air is great. Say, Budge, when are you and Skeleton going to serve dinner?"

"Soonzitsdone," was the mumbling answer.

"What's it going to be?" asked Bony, who was so glad to be at sea again, that he forgot to crack his knuckles.

"Chickensee," answered Budge, pulling out his gum, and winding it up again on his tongue.

"Chickensee?" repeated Sam, looking at Budge in wonder.

"'SwatIsaid."

"He means chicken fricassee," interpreted Nat. "Mystifying mastodons! Why don't you talk English, Budge?"

"'Slikeyours," murmured the odd chap, that being his way of saying, "It's like yours."

"He's got you there!" exclaimed Sam. "Say, Jack, what's the matter with you?" and he turned to his chum. "You've said hardly a word since we started. What's wrong?"

"Jack has a heavy thinking part in this mystery play," ventured Nat.

"That's right," agreed his chum, with a smile. "I *have* got a lot to think about, fellows; but I didn't mean to be unsociable. I certainly think this voyage is great! It's the finest outing we've ever had together."

"And if we could only get your treasure box we'd have a better time yet," went on Sam. "It certainly gets me what has become of that box."

"Oh, I'll find it yet!" declared Jack, confidently. "I think the information Miss Manacca-Fernandez gave can be relied upon."

"Why didn't you bring along some police, or detectives?" asked Sam. "You may need their help if you get to the island, and have a fight with those fellows."

"I'd rather do without them," declared Jack. "In the first place, you can't rely on any native police, and in the second place, I don't want to get Miss Manacca-Fernandez's brother in trouble. She asked me to spare him."

"And you're going to, after he took your treasure box?" asked Bony.

"I don't know that he took it," retorted Jack,

quickly. "His sister says it was a mistake; that he has it now, and she tells me where I can find it. That doesn't say that the Spaniard stole it."

"Either he or Caleb Herkimer did," declared Nat.

"Well, that's what we've got to find out," and Jack walked back and forth on the deck. The boys continued to talk of the mystery of the missing box. In fact it formed the chief topic of conversation at all times, for of late everything seemed to hinge on its recovery.

Forward sped the *Sea Bird*, covering knot after knot, on her way to Cavern Island. What would happen when she got there? That was the question each schoolboy yachtsman was asking himself; and not without some apprehension.

The fricasseed chicken met with an untimely fate when the five lads and Captain Reeger sat down to the table, for Budge ate with his friends. Skeleton, with his black face shining with grease, and pride, brought in platter after platter of the delicious food, and—went back for more.

"These Porto Rican chickens certainly have a fine flavor, fellows," remarked Jack, passing his plate for—well, never mind how many times he passed it. Sea air does give one such an appetite.

"Dey's all right, Massa Jack, only dey's monstrous small," objected Skeleton, who overheard the remark. "I done cooked ten, an'——"

"Ten chickens!" ejaculated Captain Reeger.

"Yais, sah, an' dey's mos' all gone, too."

"Then we'd better let up, fellows," observed Sam. "The crew will want something."

"Filluponpie," remarked Budge, plying his knife and fork industriously.

"Oh, there's pie; is there?" inquired Jack. "Then I guess we'll have mercy on the rest of the chickens," and the dinner was finished on dessert and coffee.

For the rest of that day the yacht made good progress, the lads aiding in the management of her, and when night came Captain Reeger gave orders to make everything snug below and aloft.

"Expect a storm?" asked Jack.

"Well, the barometer is falling, and that indicates something. It may be nothing worse than a blow, but in this region, with small islands on every side, and no very good charts to go by, I'd rather take no chances."

The wind did rise about eight o'clock, and the boys awoke at midnight to find themselves pitching and tossing about, it being hard work to maintain oneself in the berth. But the *Sea Bird* struggled gallantly on, staggering through big green waves; and when morning came the boys looked out on a tumultuous sea, for the wind was a gale now, and was increasing. Life lines were

rigged along the decks, and the boys were warned by Captain Reeger to take no chances.

The young yachtsmen had gotten up early, for sleep was practically out of the question in their rolling berths, and went out on deck after their morning wash-up.

"We'll have to take quarter cups of coffee at breakfast," observed Sam, as he held on to the rail. "If Skeleton fills 'em more than half full they'll slop all over."

"Half a cup is better than no ice-cream," remarked Jack, misquoting the proverb. "Well, here comes Skeleton to ask us if we'll kindly step below. Let's save him the trouble and go without being asked. I'm ready."

As the boys made their way toward the cabin, there suddenly sounded a loud report from the motor room. At once the yacht lost headway, hesitated a moment on the crest of a wave, slid down into the trough of the sea, and then began wallowing about, rolling like a log, while wave after wave boarded her.

"Something's happened!" yelled Jack. "Quick! Get the cover on the companion hatch or we'll be flooded!"

They rushed below, and the cover was battened down. Then they made their way to the engine room, where they could see Captain Ree-

ger, and the two machinists, bending over the motor.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack.

"One of the cylinders has cracked," explained Captain Reeger.

"Can we fix it? Have we a spare one?" inquired Jack.

"Yes," replied Jensen, "but it's going to be quite a job, and will take some time. We can't make any progress, as the intake pipe is damaged.

"We'll have to lay to——"

"In this wind?" cried Captain Reeger. "We'll be swamped, man!"

The machinist shrugged his shoulders. "Can't help it," he said. "We're helpless now."

The *Sea Bird*, like a creature with a broken wing, was fluttering helplessly in the tumult of waters. Every moment seemed to make it worse. The boys looked at each other with anxious faces.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BUDGE FALLS OVERBOARD

"How long will it take to get out the cracked cylinder, put in a new one, and start the motor?" asked Captain Reeger.

"Half a day, at the very least," answered Jensen. "It's a hard job."

"And the wind is getting worse," murmured the commander. Even as he spoke there came a staggering sea that threw the yacht over almost on her beam's ends, and sent the boys sprawling across the motor compartment. The crash of water on the deck above their heads sounded like a deluge.

"We've got to do something, boys!" exclaimed the captain. "We haven't steerageway now, and that's what makes her roll so. We'll either have to fix up a drag, or try to get some sail on her. We have sails, haven't we?" and the commander looked at Sam.

"Sure. Uncle hardly ever used 'em, but he always carried some in case of emergencies, and I guess this is one. They're not very big, but we

can bend them on the forward and aft signal masts, and it may keep us before the wind."

"Then come on deck, all hands except Jensen and Hanson, and we'll see what we can do," went on Captain Reeger.

It was hard work on the pitching deck to get out the pieces of canvas and raise them on the small masts; especially hard for lads not used to that sort of work. But they went grimly at it, though they had to cling fast with one hand to prevent being tossed overboard, and work with the other.

At last the canvas stretched out, bellying in the strong wind, and at once the yacht swung around to meet the new force that had her in charge—a force sufficiently strong, even with the small area of sail spread, to send her along at a fast clip. The improvement was immediate. Out of the trough of the sea the trim little vessel came, once more to ride the waves buoyantly, and with Captain Reeger at the helm, she was soon on her course again, flying forward before the gale.

"Now, if you boys will watch the wheel, I'll go below and see what I can do to aid the machinists," said the captain to Sam and Jack. "Budge will help us, for he's not needed up here, and I'll have Skeleton bring you up some hot coffee," for breakfast had not yet been served.

The colored cook, with much groaning and tribulation, did manage to get up on deck with a pitcher of coffee, and some empty cups, but when he endeavored to pour out the beverage he came to grief. For he let go his hold of the rail, and a sudden wave, slewing the yacht around, sent Skeleton's feet from under him, he came down with a thud on the deck, his over abundance of fat quivering all over, while the pitcher smashed, and the coffee mingled with the sea water, the cups crashing into small bits.

"Whoa, Skeleton! Where are you going?" cried Jack.

"Dat's what I'd laik t' know, Massa Jack," was the rueful answer. "'Pears laik I were bound fo' Davy Jones's locker. Yais, sah, Massa Davy done called me good an' strong dat time. 'Spects I'd better stay below."

"Yes," agreed Jack, seeing how difficult it would be to serve anything on deck. "We'll take turns at it. Bony and Nat, you go below and get some grub. Sam and I will stay at the wheel. When you have had enough come up and relieve us."

"Don't say that," begged Sam.

"Say what?"

"Why, when they's had 'enough.' Bony never gets enough. That's why he's so thin. Just say when they've eaten half the grub there is, to come up. Leave the other half for us."

"All right," agreed Jack. "Go ahead, fellows."

The lads were in lighter mood, now that the yacht was moving ahead over the waves, instead of trying to dive under them. Nat and Bony soon relieved Jack and Sam at the wheel, and after the latter had eaten a breakfast under considerable difficulties, for the table was like the slanting roof of a house at times, they went to the engine room.

They found that the machinists and the captain, with the efficient aid of Budge, had removed the cracked cylinder, and were getting ready to put in the new one. Their work was hampered by the rolling and pitching of the craft, and the boys had to lend their aid in the work. All the rest of the morning, and part of the afternoon, they labored, and about four o'clock the captain announced that they would try to start the motor.

There were a few anxious moments, when the machinery, with a series of coughs, sobs, sighs and goans, could not seem to make up its mind what to do. But finally, after the fly wheel had been turned over several times, there was the welcome "chug-chug", and the screw began to revolve.

It was well that they started the motor as they did, for there came a sudden gust of wind a moment later, that carried away the forward sail, and strained the bolt-ropes of the other well-nigh to the breaking point. Had the sails been ren-

dered useless, and had the motor not started, the vessel might have been wrecked, for an efficient drag, to keep her head around, could hardly have been gotten over in time. As it was, they won out by a narrow margin, and once more they were moving along under the power of gasoline.

The accident had been a misfortune in another way, for they had been blown off their course by the storm, and now had many knots to cover ere they could be back on it again. But there was no help for it.

The next day the wind died down, the sea calmed, and the craft had easier going, for which the boys were thankful.

It was toward the close of a pleasant afternoon, that had succeeded the storm, and the boys crowded to the rail, for Captain Reeger had told them that they might, at any time now, sight Cavern Island. With a telescope, and a pair of powerful glasses, the schoolboy yachtsmen were eagerly scanning the horizon for a sight of a dark speck that would proclaim the object of their cruise.

"There it is! I see it!" cried Nat, who had the telescope. "Right over there! My, but it's small, though!"

"Let me see?" suggested Captain Reeger, coming aft, and leaving one of the machinists at the wheel.

He looked long and earnestly.



AN INSTANT LATER HE LEAPED OVER THE
SIDE AFTER BUDGE.

"That isn't the island," he said, at length. "It's a vessel, making her way toward it, though, for she's on the same course that we are."

"What sort of a vessel?" asked Jack.

"I can't make her out, but she seems rather small,—not much larger than the *Sea Bird*."

"Maybe it's——" Jack began, and then he stopped. He was about to suggest that it was the *Dolphin*, but he concluded that he would make no guesses.

"Well, we'll soon pick her up, and raise the island, too, I think," went on the captain, as he walked forward.

"Let's have a look," suggested Budge, throwing away his gum, and wanting to do something in the interval of inserting a fresh supply. "Can you make out a vessel through that telescope?"

"I can't see anything but some smoke," said Nat, "but Captain Reeger has better eyesight. Here, Budge."

He handed the lad the brass instrument, and Budge, leaning far over the rail, endeavored to pick out the speck which the commander had said was a vessel. He had some difficulty in finding it, as, indeed, most persons would have had. He shifted his position, and was transferring the glass from his left to his right eye, when the yacht gave a little roll.

Instinctively Budge tried to balance himself, but

one foot slipped on a rope's end, and, a moment later, the telescope fell from his hand to the desk, while Budge, with outstretched hands, went over the railing into the sea.

"Man overboard! Man overboard!" bawled Sam.

"Budge is overboard!" cried Nat.

Sam, with ready wit, threw after the lad a life buoy, and ran to tell Captain Reeger to stop the craft. As for Jack, he stripped off his coat, and, with another motion got rid of his rubber-soled yachting shoes. An instant later he leaped over the side after Budge.

CHAPTER XXIX

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

"LOWER the boat!" cried Bony, springing to where, at the davits, swung a small craft. "Lower the boat!"

"I'll help!" shouted Nat.

The two cast off the ropes from the holding cleats, and the boat was swung outward. Then the two lads lowered away.

"Can you see 'em," yelled Bony.

"No, they're quite a distance astern!" answered Nat. "But come on! Slide down the davit ropes!"

The sea was so calm that the boat lay easily alongside, and the falls had not unhooked. Nat and Bony slid down into the craft, and cast her loose.

By this time Captain Reeger had been told by Sam what had happened, and at once threw the lever of the engine room telegraph over to full speed astern. The yacht slowed up, quivered from end to end, and began to move backward.

Sam and the captain ran to the after deck. They could see Jack swimming around, but there was no sight of Budge.

"He's—he's gone under for the last time!" gasped Sam.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the captain. "He's around here somewhere. They'll pick him up. Didn't you tell me he was a good swimmer?"

"Yes, but——"

By this time the boat, containing Nat and Bony, was close to Jack.

"See anything of him?" yelled Nat.

"No!" panted Jack, for it was hard work swimming about in his clothes.

"There's the life buoy over there," added Bony, standing up and pointing to the white, canvas-covered, cork ring.

"Yes, and by the hifaluting Halifax, if Budge isn't inside of it!" shouted Nat. "I never thought to look for him there. Pull over that way, Bony!"

They bent to the oars, Jack, too, started to swim in the same direction.

"There he is! They see him!" cried Sam, from the deck of the yacht. "Oh, if they can only get to him in time. Can't you put the *Sea Bird* over there, Captain Reeger?"

"There is no need. They can rescue him in the small boat better than we can. I guess he's all right."

In a few seconds more the small boat was close to Budge, Jack having climbed in as it passed him. He sat, dripping wet, in the stern. As for Budge,

that odd lad was clinging to the life buoy, and floating along as unconcerned as if he was lying on his back in the mill pond at Denton, chewing gum.

"Are you all right, Budge?" questioned Bony.

"Sure. But you fellows were long enough coming after me."

"Long enough!" gasped Nat, indignantly.

"Well, I like your nerve! We lowered the boat in record time; didn't we, Bony?"

"Sure. Why didn't you swim in, Budge?"

"Oh, I thought you'd be along some time or other; and it was nice and comfortable here, as long as there aren't any sharks."

"There comes one now!" yelled Jack, leaping up, and with a dramatic gesture pointing past Budge. The odd lad merely raised himself slightly in the water, by means of the buoy, glanced around, and settled back.

"Rats!" he exclaimed. "If there'd been any in these waters I'd been eaten long ago. Put the boat alongside and I'll get in. Did you bring any gum with you?"

"Gum!" sniffed Jack. "It's a pity you didn't take some along when you went overboard! Climb in now, and don't get me all wet."

Seeing that Jack was soaked, it was hard to understand how he could be any wetter.

Budge clambered in, making little puddles of

water all over the boat, which Nat and Bony tried to avoid. But they were pretty well splattered before they got back to the yacht.

"Don't try that again, please," cautioned Captain Reeger, as Budge came up on deck, lugging the life buoy with him.

"Why; did I bust the telescope?" asked the queer lad.

"No. Fortunately it fell on a coil of rope. But you held us up, and every minute counts now. I want to hurry to Cavern Island and see what other vessel is heading for it."

"All right, I'll be careful," promised Budge, and he went below for dry clothes, soon reappearing on deck with a wad of gum, as big as a walnut, in his cheek.

The *Sea Bird* was soon on her way again, and, as she reeled off knot after knot, the speck of land that represented the island became dimly visible, and rapidly grew larger. The smoke from the other vessel was no longer to be seen.

The commander got out his charts, and studied the sea about the island. There was fairly deep water up to within a short distance of it, but, fearing rocks or hidden shoals, the captain decided to anchor a short distance away, and land in the small launch.

Nearer and nearer approached the *Sea Bird*. The island could be plainly seen with the naked

eye, and, under the glasses loomed up comparatively large.

"There doesn't seem to be any life on it," observed Jack.

"It's too soon to tell," was Sam's opinion. "Maybe you'll find the Spaniard, and his pretty sister, waiting on shore to hand you the treasure box."

"I hope so," murmured Jack, looking with anxious eyes at the speck of land in the waste of waters.

With a splash, the anchor of the *Sea Bird* was let go. The craft swung at the chain, and drifted broadside to the island. The launch was lowered, and the four boys, with Captain Reeger, went ashore. Budge and the machinists were left in charge of the yacht.

"Doesn't appear to be anything doing," remarked Nat. "All I see are birds flying around."

"You forget that we've got to go to the cave," suggested Jack, in a quiet voice. "It's there where the box is said to be."

"Maybe it's all a joke on the part of the pretty Spanish girl," suggested Nat. "Girls are queer, and have funny ideas of fun. Maybe she's sent you on this wild goose chase to get rid of you."

"That'll do you," said Jack, still quietly, but Nat saw that his chum meant what he said.

The launch grounded on a gently sloping, sandy

shore, and, carrying the kedge anchor up the beach, the prongs were stuck in the sand, to prevent the rising tide from carrying the launch out to sea.

"Well, we're here, anyhow," said Sam. "I don't see anything of another vessel, either."

"No, the place seems deserted," remarked Captain Reeger. "But suppose we take a stroll about. Maybe we can find the cave."

They began a systematic circuit of the island, which was not more than eight miles in circumference. As they went along they kept careful watch for any signs of persons now on the place, or having been there recently. There were none, however.

"We're like Robinson Crusoe," remarked Bony, with a laugh, "looking for footprints in the sand."

"But I understood the cave was a large one," said Jack, "and what gets me is that we haven't seen a sight of it, and we've walked two or three miles."

"It is rather odd," agreed Captain Reeger. "Perhaps the entrance to it is concealed."

They kept on for some little time longer. The island was hilly in the centre, sloping down on all sides to the sea. The cave might be in the centre, where there was a large hill.

When they had completed half the circuit of the place, Jack proposed that they go inland for a

distance, and get a view of the island from the top of a mound. They started, finding the way rather difficult on account of many large boulders. Jack was in the lead, eagerly advancing. He made a turn around a clump of bushes, and, a moment later, he held up his hand with a cautionary gesture.

"What is it?" whispered Nat.

"Don't you hear voices?" asked Jack.

They listened. From somewhere, seemingly beneath them, could be heard the murmur of men's tones.

"We're near the cave," whispered Sam. "Go on, Jack!"

Jack advanced. His foot slipped, and, to save himself from falling, he grasped at a small tree. It came away in his hands, being uprooted, but the hold was sufficient to prevent him from toppling over.

The next instant he uttered a low, startled cry, and pointed to the spot where the tree had been. In its place was a hole, where the roots had pulled out. But the strangest part of it was that the hole showed a glimmer of light—a flash as from some lantern.

As the other pressed eagerly forward to look, some more dirt fell away, making the opening larger. Then they saw that they were looking

down into a cave, and by the gleam of lights in it they made a startling discovery.

Grouped in the centre of the cavern were a number of persons, and, as Jack looked, he whispered:

"Jonas Lavine, Hemp Smith and Jerry Chowden! They're in there!"

"Any one else," asked Sam.

"Yes, there's Caleb Herkimer!"

"The scoundrel!" gasped Nat. "I wonder how he got in with them? Do you see your treasure box?"

"No, but—by Jove! fellows, they have the Spaniard—Señor Manacca-Fernandez, tied to a stake in the middle of the cave, and they're going to torture him! They've got a big rawhide whip! We must rescue him!"

Jack sprang back, as if about to enlarge the hole, and leap into the cave.

"Wait," said Captain Reeger, quietly.

CHAPTER XXX

THE EMPTY BOX

JACK looked at the commander in surprise.

"But—but——" he whispered, motioning toward the cave. "We can't stand here, and let them lash him to death!"

"And we can't break in there through this hole," added the commander. "In the first place, it is too small, and if we started to enlarge it they'd take the alarm and get away. It is quite a distance from here to where they are." This was so, as the cavern was a large one.

"Then what had we better do?" asked Jack, and the other lads waited anxiously for the captain's answer. "I'm sure my treasure box is there," went on Jack, "and I want it."

"I don't blame you a bit," replied the captain, quietly. "But we want to go at this in the right way. I don't see anything of the box, but possibly it may be in the cave. However, if we attempted to rush in now they would either hide it where you nor I could not find it, or they would escape with it. What I propose is this: You and I will remain here, on guard. We can stay and listen

unobserved, for they are not aware that we are here. Then we can hear and see what goes on. In the meantime Sam had better go back to the yacht and tell Budge and the others to get ready for action."

"What sort of action?" asked Sam.

"I don't know, exactly, but I think something will happen shortly, and it is well to be prepared. Nat, I wish you and Bony would take a stroll about, going as cautiously as you can, and see if you can find the main entrance to this cave. Somehow or other, we seemed to have missed it. If you find it in, say an hour, come back here and tell us. We will wait here that length of time; Jack and I. If you don't return in sixty minutes we'll look you up. Now, be careful, and don't run into danger."

"Tell Bony not to crack his finger joints," suggested Nat. "That will surely give us away."

"I—I'll try not to do it," promised the thin lad.

They had been talking in whispers, and their presence at the hole that opened into the cave had not been noticed. Our friends had, from time to time, glanced down into the cavern. They could see the unfortunate Spaniard tied to a post in the centre of the vaulted space, while around him were grouped Lavine, Hemp Smith, Jerry Chowden and Caleb Herkimer.

Herkimer had a heavy, rawhide whip, which

he cracked from time to time in a suggestive and cruel manner. The four rascals seemed to be holding a conference, and the Spaniard, in spite of his bound condition, looked at them indifferently, and even scornfully.

"I wonder what they can be up to?" said Jack.

"We'll soon find out," was the captain's reply.

"Now, Sam, you and the others had better start off."

Sam, Bony and Nat had not been gone three minutes ere the conference in the cave broke up. It had been carried on among Lavine and the others in such low tones that neither Jack nor the captain could hear anything that was said. Now the time for action seemed to have arrived.

Caleb Herkimer approached the bound man, snapping the heavy whip. He stood a short distance from the Spaniard, and addressed him, in tones that carried to Jack and the captain.

"There's no use fooling over this thing any longer," Herkimer said. "We've had a talk, and we've decided to make you tell us the secret of the treasure box."

"Never!" exclaimed Señor Fernandez. "I will never tell. It is my secret—not yours!"

"We'll see about that!" jeered Jonas Lavine.

"I guess that whip will make you talk," added Jerry Chowden, with a cruel smile on his ugly face.

"Then Herkimer hasn't the treasure box after all," whispered Jack to the captain. "The Spaniard has it and won't tell where it is."

"Hush!" cautioned the commander.

"Are you going to tell, or not?" demanded Caleb, approaching closer to the captive, and snapping the whip almost in his face. "Are you going to tell us what we want to know, or not?"

"Never!" almost shouted the Spaniard.

"I'll give you one more chance," went on the former clerk of Judge Bennett.

"He's had chances enough!" interrupted Jonas Lavine. "Lay the lash on his back a few times, and he'll sing a different tune. Come on, Hemp. You and I will strip him, and then the dance will begin."

Jack could hardly hold himself back from making his way into the cave, when he saw Lavine and the faker go up to the captive, and fairly tear his clothing from his back, ready for the cruel lash.

"Now, go ahead," ordered Lavine. "Lay 'em on good, Herkimer! Make him tell us the secret. He's got the stuff hidden away somewhere, and we're going to have it!"

Herkimer rolled up his sleeves, and took a firmer grip on the handle of the whip. The others moved back, and he stood at the side of the captive.

"Now, then," he said, "I'll ask you once more, and for the last time. Will you tell us the secret of the treasure box?"

"Never! Never! Never!" cried the Spaniard. "You may lash me to pieces, but I will never tell! That treasure belongs to me, and to my sister. It is for her—if I die!"

Jack, looking in on the scene, could not repress a shudder. He wondered if he could hold himself back when the lashing began. He was afraid not. He looked at Captain Reeger. The commander was pale.

"Think a moment," went on Herkimer. "When I helped you to get this box, you agreed to share with me part of what was in it."

"They must have stolen it together!" whispered Jack. He was beginning to understand some things now.

"When I helped you get it from the Judge's office," went on Herkimer, "you said you would share with me."

"So I did, and so I would have done!" burst out the captive. "But you played me false! You stole the box from me, and made away with it—you and your confederates. I pursued you, and caught you, but you have forfeited any share in the treasure, for you tried to steal it all for yourself."

"I only did what you would have done," sneered

the former law clerk. "Besides, I admit I acted hastily. Now the box is here, but you have taken the treasure out."

Jack started at those words.

"You got ahead of me," continued Herkimer. "You looted the box after you stole it away from me."

"I never stole the box!" cried the Spaniard. "It belonged to me and my sister by right of law. It should have come to us after Señor Miguel Montez died. But somehow the box did not reach us, and Señor Montez gave it to Señor Ranger. We were defrauded of our rights—my sister and I—by Señor Ranger, and we planned to get what was ours, for we were the heirs of Señor Montez. I cannot understand why he did not bequeath the treasure to us."

But Jack understood. He remembered his father, in his letter, had stated that the Spaniard, Montez, believed that his relatives were all dead—that the last of them had perished in the Martinique earthquake. Evidently Montez was mistaken, and the Manacca brother and sister were the rightful heirs to the treasure box.

"So," went on the young Spaniard, "when I found I had been defrauded, I decided to act. You yourself drew up the papers in the office of the advocate—Judge Bennett—you drew up the papers by which we proved that the box was

mine, and promised to give the documents to Señor Ranger. So it was no theft to take the box which was mine."

"That paper was no good," said Caleb. "I only drew it up to satisfy you and your sister. You caught me at the wrong time. In fact, you interrupted me when—well, there's no use beating about the bush—when, in another half hour I'd have been out of the way with the treasure box myself. You just happened to come in when I was opening the safe."

"That paper—the document—you say it was no good?" asked the Spaniard, leaning forward so that his bonds strained.

"No good at all," answered Caleb, with a laugh. "I only drew it up to please you and your sister. She knows it was a fake. I sent word to her about it the other day."

Something like a groan came from the captive.

"And I thought I was doing right," he murmured, "Now Señor Ranger thinks I have stolen the box—the box that was mine. He thinks my sister a thief, too, perhaps."

"Very likely," sneered Caleb. "Now, are you going to tell the secret?"

The Spaniard did not answer.

"Bring out the box," commanded Caleb to his confederates. "Maybe when he sees it he'll tell us."

Jerry Chowden went to some part of the cave which Jack and the captain could not see, and presently came back carrying the treasure box.

"There it is!" exclaimed our hero, in a hoarse whisper. "They have it! Why, then, do they want the Spaniard to tell the secret of it?"

"Hush!" cautioned the captain. "Let us see what happens."

The box was placed in front of the captive. He did not even seem to glance at it.

"There it is!" cried Caleb. "Empty, as you can see," and he threw back the cover. "Empty as a cracker box," went on the clerk, bitterly. "Somehow, you found a way to get the treasure out. You fooled us, and hid it, and we now demand that you tell where it is."

"Never!" cried the Spaniard.

Jack was looking at the empty box—the treasure box which had been his, and which he had risked so much to recover. Now all his efforts seemed useless. He was recalled from his momentary fit of abstraction by what happened in the cave. The sight of the empty box seemed to enrage Herkimer. With a cry of anger, he raised the whip and rushed at the unfortunate captive.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FLIGHT

JACK could hardly hold himself back. He sprang forward, as if about to leap into the cavern, but he felt the restraining hand of Captain Reeger on his shoulder. Jack turned his head away. He did not want to see the bound man tortured with the heavy whip.

But he need have had no fear.

No sooner had Caleb Herkimer sprang forward to administer the blows, than the Spaniard himself leaped away from the post, and stood free in the midst of his enemies! He had broken, or secretly cut, his bonds while they were preparing to flog him. A cry of astonishment, not unmingled with fear, came from his captors.

"He's loose!" cried Lavine.

"Look out!" bawled Jerry Chowden. "He may have a knife and stab us! Let me get out of his way! I didn't do anything! Say, Mr. Spaniard, I didn't take any of your treasure from the box! Please don't hurt me," and the big coward was actually blubbering, as he rushed about, seeking to find a place.

"Grab hold of him, some of you; can't you?" demanded Jonas Lavine. "He must have slipped out of his ropes. Grab him!"

"I'll fix him!" cried Caleb. "Come on, Hemp, you and I can manage him!"

"Stand back!" fairly yelled the former captive. "Don't you dare to lay a hand on me!"

With flashing eyes he faced his enemies. He did not seem at all afraid of them, though they outnumbered him four to one. They hesitated, and with a quick motion Señor Fernandez caught up a heavy stake. He swung this about his head.

"I'll strike down in his tracks any man who stops me!" he cried. "You thought I was going to submit tamely to the indignity of the lash! Know then, that the blood of kings runs in my veins! The Fernandez have never been whipped!" and he fairly hissed the words. "You tried to rob me of my treasure, but I have foiled you. Now I will bid you farewell! I have had enough of your company," and he actually smiled at them. He was a brave man among cowards.

Such was the spell of fear that he cast over them, that Lavine and the others actually permitted him to start to walk out. With his club held in readiness, Señor Fernandez advanced. He, however, kept a watchful eye on his enemies.

Suddenly, as he neared the open, and apparently empty, treasure box, he dropped his club.

With a quick gesture he slammed shut the cover, and, picking up the box, ran on with all his might.

"There he goes!" yelled Jerry Chowden, as if there was any doubt of it.

"Stop him!" shouted Hemp Smith.

"Throw something at him," advised Lavine, as the safest course to pursue.

"I'll catch him!" yelled Caleb Herkimer, vindictively, and, tossing aside the whip, which he had not had a chance to use, he sprinted after the captive. The others in the cave trailed after him.

The pusuers and the pursued were now out of the sight of Jack and the captain.

"Come on!" cried our hero.

"Where?" asked the commander.

"Down to the beach! They'll be sure to come out there. We've got to help the Spaniard, and get at the bottom of this business!"

"But if your treasure box is empty, what good is it? No wonder Caleb Herkimer was willing to dispose of it to you for a thousand dollars."

"Never mind. We'll find out about that later. Come on."

They started down the slope, but had not reached the bottom before Nat and Bony were seen coming up, panting from a run.

"We've found the cave entrance!" gasped Bony, permitting himself to crack a couple of joints.

"Take us to it, quick!" called Jack. "Something has happened!"

"It's quite a distance away," added Nat. "Side-stepping centipedes! It's a big cave, though! We went in a little way."

"Come on!" was all Jack answered.

Slipping, sliding, stumbling, and all but rolling down the slope, went the four. Stones, dislodged by their progress, made a small avalanche.

They found themselves on the beach, and sprinted along that, with Nat and Bony leading the way. There was no sight of the Spaniard and those pursuing him.

"This way!" shouted Nat, making a turn. In the meanwhile Jack had told his chums what had happened in the cavern.

Up the slope they started once more, toward the mouth of the cave, but they had not gone a dozen steps ere from a clump of bushes that hid the mouth of the cavern, burst a man. It was the Spaniard, and he carried the treasure box.

At the sight of Jack and his chums he hesitated, and then, as the shouts of his pursuers rang out behind him, and as he caught a glimpse of them, he came forward again, but more slowly.

"Shall we stop him?" asked Nat. Jack did not know what to answer. The things he had heard in the cave puzzled him. Had he any right to the box now?

Señor Fernandez still advanced. Then, from behind him, through the bushes, leaped Lavine, Jerry Chowden and the others. At the sight of our friends the former bully of Washington Hall stopped and turned pale.

"There he is! Come on!" yelled Caleb Herkimer. Then he, too, saw Jack and the others. But he only hesitated a moment.

Once more he leaped forward, and, as Señor Fernandez had slackened his pace, the former law clerk was able to catch up to him. Herkimer dealt the Spaniard a hard blow, the former captive being unable to defend himself, because of the box. He went down in a heap.

"Come on!" cried Herkimer to his confederates. "I've got the box. There must be something valuable in it, or he wouldn't stick to it so tight. Come on! We'll find out the secret yet!"

The Spaniard attempted to rise, and regain the box, but he was too weak. Motioning to his companions to follow, Caleb Herkimer slipped through the bushes once more.

"Come on!" yelled Jack. "We must catch him! He has my treasure box!"

Captain Reeger, Nat and Bony turned to follow Jack. They gave no more attention to the Spaniard, who was now on his feet, seemingly dazed.

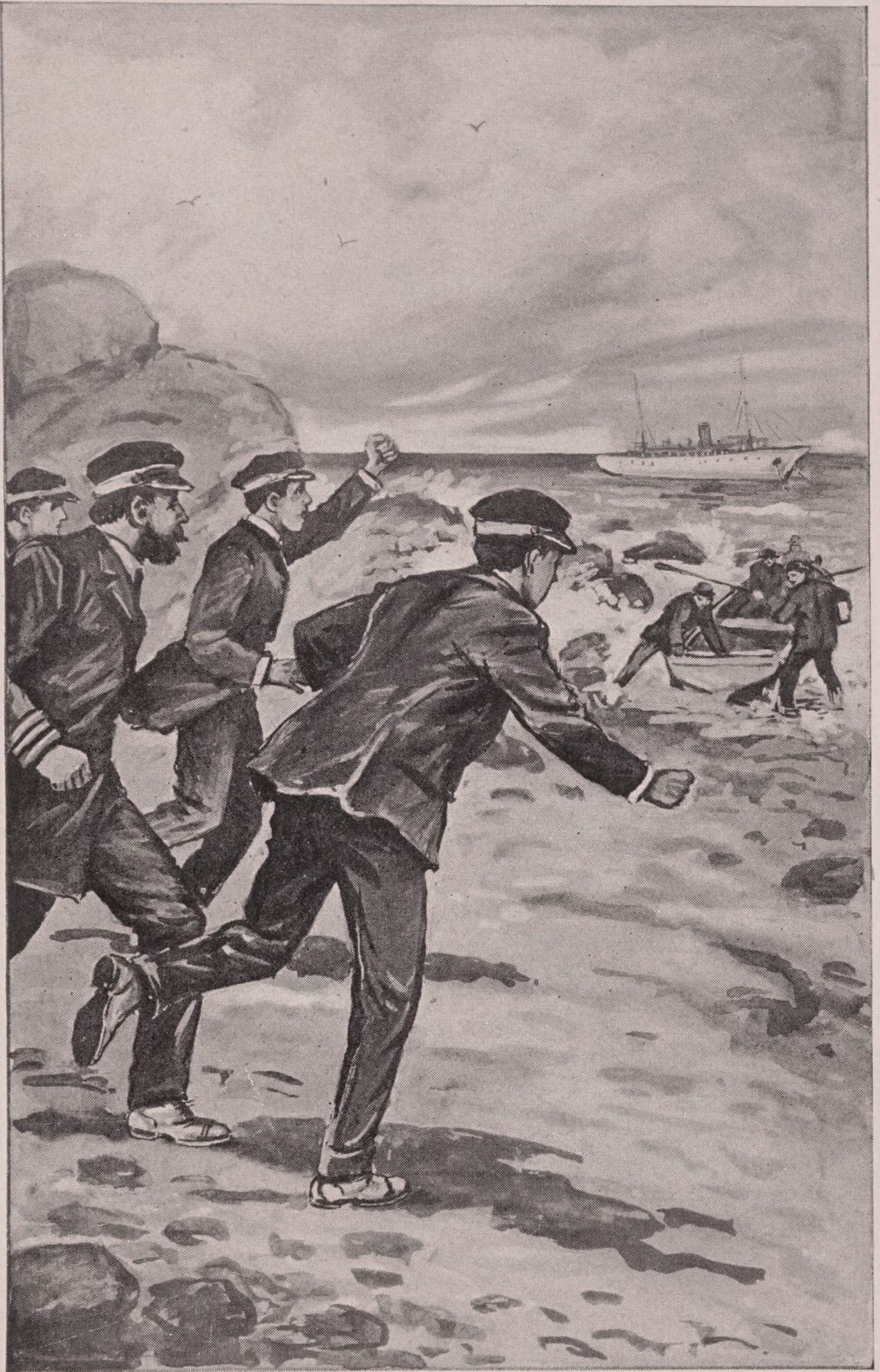
After the fleeing ones raced our friends. They

burst through a fringe of bushes, to behold the beach and sea lying before them. And, in a little cove, snugly hidden from sight, was anchored the *Dolphin-Annabell*!

"There's their boat!" cried Jack. "We must catch them!"

But the others had the advantage. They raced down to the beach, upon which was drawn a small boat. Into this leaped Lavine, Hemp Smith, Jerry Chowden and Caleb Herkimer, the latter still carrying the treasure box. They pushed off from shore.

"They're going to escape!" cried Jack, despairingly.



"THEY'RE GOING TO ESCAPE!" CRIED JACK, DESPAIRINGLY.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PURSUIT

THAT this was the object of Lavine and his crowd was soon apparent. Swiftly they rowed out to where the *Dolphin* was anchored, and, while our friends stood looking helplessly on, the rascals boarded the yacht. Jack could see them hoisting the treasure box on deck, and his last hope left him.

"Oh, if I could only get it back!" he exclaimed.

"But why do you want it, if it's empty?" asked Nat.

"Maybe it isn't empty," said Jack. "There is some secret about it, and I'm going to find out what it is."

"Then you'd better get a move on," advised Bony. "Those fellows will soon be getting away from here."

Even as he spoke there sounded over the water the throb and hum of a motor in action. Then a chain cable rattled through the hawse hole, and the anchor came up dripping from the sea. A moment later the *Dolphin* swung away from the island.

"And our yacht's miles away!" exclaimed Jack, with a groan. "We should have raced back there, instead of standing here like a lot of chumps, to watch them escape."

"Well, it's not too late," declared Captain Reeger. "Come on; let's get back to the *Sea Bird*. We can get under way in a few minutes."

"But we can never catch them," was Nat's opinion. "They have a faster boat."

"You never can tell what will happen in a motor craft," said the captain. "We have a chance. Come, we'll take advantage of it."

They turned away from the beach. There was a line of foam under the stern of the *Dolphin*, and, as Jack looked at her speeding out to sea, he fancied he could see a hand waving at him, as if in mockery.

They hurried to where they had landed in the small boat. Sam was there waiting for them in it. He had been out to the yacht, to tell Budge and the machinists to get ready for a quick departure, and had returned to shore. Rapidly Jack told him what had happened.

"Then we'll give them a chase!" cried Sam. "My uncle's yacht is at your disposal, Jack, as long as you want, or even longer. We'll catch these scoundrels yet!"

As they were about to pull away, there sounded a shout up the beach. They all looked, and saw

Señor Fernandez running toward them. He was excitedly waving his hands, and trying to hold his tattered shirt about his body.

"For heaven's sake, gentlemen!" he cried, "do not leave me alone on this island. I will starve. Take me off. I know you all—or, at least, Señor Ranger, considers me his enemy, but you would not abandon even your worst enemy to a living death on this island. The others have gone—do not leave me!"

"What shall we do?" asked Captain Reeger.

"Take him aboard," decided Jack promptly. "There is more to this mystery than we have yet discovered," he added, in a low voice. "I do not believe he deliberately stole my treasure box. Besides, his sister gave me the clew where to find it. We can't let him stay here to starve, even if he did try to rob me. Take him along."

So it was agreed, and the Spaniard, murmuring his thanks, entered the small boat. His face lighted up when Jack told him that they were about to set off in pursuit of Lavine and the others.

"Ah, gentlemen!" he exclaimed, "if you catch them, I shall have something to say to them. They treated me shamefully. We must get the box away from them."

"But if the box is empty?" asked Nat, "what good is it to any one?"

Señor Fernandez looked at him quickly, and then at Jack.

"Ah," he said, quietly, "but the box is *not* empty."

"Not empty!" exclaimed our hero. "Why, I saw the cover open myself."

"Yes, but there is a secret about that box," went on the Spaniard. "A secret that only I and my sister know, for we are the sole possessors of it. The treasure is still in the box!"

"But—but——" began Captain Reeger, thinking perhaps the Spaniard's mind might have been turned by his suffering.

"Wait," advised Jack, quietly, "if there is a secret it will be time enough to reveal it when we have the box. And we are going to have no end of trouble in getting it, if I'm any judge."

"As you like," answered the Spaniard. "I will reveal the secret whenever you wish, and——"

"And also settle the ownership of the box?" asked Captain Reeger, quickly.

"Indeed, yes," was the reply. "I am aware that Señor Ranger lays some claim to it, and I am willing to have it settled in law, and also to explain my conduct, which, at times, must have been somewhat of a puzzle to you," and he looked quizzically at Jack.

"Well, I was a bit uncertain," answered our hero.

"Can you tell me anything of my sister?" asked Señor Fernandez, eagerly. "I left her in New York, to my great sorrow, and I have been unable to communicate with her directly. I understood that she sailed for home——"

"With us," interrupted Jack.

The Spaniard uttered a cry of surprise, and then Jack told him of the Spanish girl's appeal, and how he had given her passage to Porto Rico.

"You have made me your debtor for life," said Señor Fernandez, feelingly.

They were soon aboard the *Sea Bird*, where the Spaniard was given a new shirt. Up came the anchor, and in a few minutes the yacht was speeding around the island, to begin the pursuit of the *Dolphin*.

"There she is!" cried Jack, who was searching the sea with a powerful glass. "She's dead ahead!"

"A stern chase is a long chase," Captain Reeger reminded him. "We'll crowd on all the speed possible. We may catch them."

All day long the chase was kept up, but the *Sea Bird* could not seem to draw any nearer to the *Dolphin*. The latter had too much of a lead. But there was this satisfaction, that she did not increase it. This showed that the vessel of our friends was making as good time as was the one containing the evildoers. If by some chance the for-

ward boat should be delayed, there would be a different aspect to the chase.

The sun began to go down in the west, and the day was drawing to a close. Jack and his chums, on the forward deck, took turns looking at the vessel of which they were in chase. As for the Spaniard, he, too, watched the pursuit with eager eyes. Budge and the machinists spent all their time in the motor compartment, using double quantities of oil, and keeping the machinery in proper "tune", so that it would do its best. And, indeed, the yacht was skimming along faster than she ever had done before. It seemed as if she was alive, and realized that she must do her best.

An hour passed. It was getting rather hazy, but still the *Dolphin* could be made out. Captain Reeger turned the wheel over to Sam, and came forward. Jack handed him the glass.

No sooner had the commander put it to his eye, than he cried out:

"By Jove, boys! Something has happened!"

"What?" demanded Jack, eagerly.

"They're stopping! They've stopped!" went on Captain Reeger. "Boys, they've had a collision with something or other. They are taking to the small boats! Their craft must be sinking! They're going over the side! Now's our chance!"

Jack took the glass, which the captain handed back to him.

"It's so!" he cried. "The *Dolphin* is sinking. She may go down before they can get off! We must save them! I say, Budge, can you get any more speed out of her?" he called down the transom of the motor room.

"We'll try," was the laconic answer of the odd lad.

The motors did seem to hum and throb with faster beats. The screw did seem to beat the water more violently.

Forward rushed the *Sea Bird* toward the sinking yacht, which contained Jack Ranger's treasure box, and the rascals who had it. Could they be reached in time?

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SECRET OF THE BOX—CONCLUSION

EAGERLY, in the fast-fading light, did our friends peer forward at the wrecked vessel toward which they were speeding. In the engine room Budge and the two men did valiant service. Never had the *Sea Bird* sped along better.

It was rapidly getting dark, but ere the last light of the sunset melted from the sky the pursuing vessel was close enough to see that the rascals had all gotten safely off, and were in a small boat, rowing away from the wreck. Nor were they any too safe, for the *Dolphin* was rapidly settling, and the vortex might yet engulf them.

"Row out of the way! Row out of the way!" cried Captain Reeger. "She'll suck you down with her, if you don't!"

They heard his warning and heeded it. As quickly as they could they got their boat out of danger. It was hard work, for the small craft was crowded, until the gunwales were but a few inches from the water's edge. She contained, besides Lavine, Hemp Smith, Caleb Herkimer and

Jerry Chowden, two machinists who had operated the motor.

Hardly were they a safe distance away when the *Dolphin*, which had been slowly settling, went under the water with a suddenness that was startling. A tumult of waves succeeded, and the boat containing the survivors danced about.

"Oh, we'll be upset! we'll be drowned!" cried Jerry Chowden. "I wish I'd never come on this trip. Save me, somebody!"

"Hush your noise, you big baby!" murmured Jonas Lavine.

"But I don't want to drown!" objected Jerry.

"I say, will you take us aboard, if we promise to do just as you say?" asked Caleb Herkimer of Captain Reeger. "We're at the end of our rope, and we give up."

He looked apprehensively about. The wind was rising and the sea was choppy. Night was coming on, and the prospect of spending it at sea in an open boat was not alluring.

"What did you do with the box?" called Jack. He had a fear that it had gone down with the yacht.

"It's here," answered Caleb, meekly. "It's of no use, though. That Spaniard looted it when he got a chance."

Señor Fernandez, who heard this, smiled, and murmured:

"Empty, eh? We shall see!"

"Will you agree to do exactly as we tell you?" demanded Captain Reeger.

"We've got to," answered Lavine, with an uneasy laugh. "There is no choice."

"You'll be treated as well as you deserve," spoke the commander, "but when I'm going to have a lot of rascals on my boat I make provisions accordingly. I know you of old, Jonas Lavine."

"Oh, we'll do anything if you'll only save us!" whined Jerry, who was blubbering. "I'll sweep the deck, and dust off the furniture or—or even wash the dishes."

"All right," assented the commander. "Then the first thing to do is to pass up the treasure box. I'll lower a rope."

"You're welcome to it," murmured Caleb Herkimer. "I wish I'd never seen it. It's no good, anyhow."

"Then you won't regret parting with it," was the captain's grim reply. "Make that rope fast to it, and we'll haul it up. Then I'll have the accommodation ladder put over the side for you."

The treasure box was soon hoisted up. There was a moment of embarrassment between Jack and Señor Fernandez as it rested on the deck between them, but the Spaniard, with a courtly gesture, said:

"Señor Ranger, take it to your cabin. At any

time you wish, I will reveal the secret of it to you."

Jack went below with his box, which he had recovered after so much effort and no little danger. He hardly realized that he had it. What was its secret? Did it contain any treasure?

A little later the conspirators came aboard. They were a very much humbled lot, and willing to do anything to be saved from the fate they feared. They were sent forward to a large storeroom, which, they were told, would be their living place until land was reached. Some cots were put in the place and they were given a supply of food. Captain Reeger said he was not taking any chances with such scoundrels, so they were searched, their weapons and knives were taken away, and the door was securely locked.

Their two machinists were not treated in this way, as the latter were able to prove that they had had no hand in the proceedings, but had merely been hired with the boat, to work it wherever directed by Lavine. They were given berths with the crew of the *Sea Bird*, and very decent chaps they proved, too. They explained that in trying to escape Lavine had run the boat on hidden rocks, not knowing that part of the ocean, and being unversed in reading the charts. A big hole was torn in the bow of the *Dolphin*,

through which the sea rushed rapidly in, barely giving them chance to escape.

"There are a lot of things about this treasure box that puzzle me," remarked Jack, "and one is how Caleb Herkimer came to be mixed up with Hemp Smith and the others. He didn't know them before."

"I think I can tell you how that was," said one of the machinists. "Herkimer got rather frightened after he had taken the box, at least so I gather from what I overheard them talking about from time to time. He wanted to get to an out-of-the-way place, and didn't know just where to head for. He finally settled on Porto Rico, and there by chance he fell in with Lavine, who is always having something to do with ships, and Lavine, I understand, proposed to help Herkimer, who was in some sort of trouble about the box. Of course, Lavine wanted a share of the treasure. Later, Hemp Smith, as you call him, joined them, though I believe Chowden was with Lavine from the start."

"I suspected it might be something like that," remarked Jack. "Well, we've broken up the combination, anyhow, and——"

"You have your treasure box," interrupted Sam, with a laugh.

"I have the box, but not the treasure," spoke Jack, "but I guess it can't be helped."

"Pardon, Señors," spoke the Spaniard, in soft tones, "but might I request that you land me somewhere on the island of Porto Rico, before you sail for home?"

"Of course we will," answered Jack.

"Not only that, but I would be pleased to have you for my guests at Ponce. I have not a very pretentious place, but I would make you welcome—my sister and I. I believe she is at home now, though I sailed from New York without her."

Nat winked at Jack, who blushed a little.

"And still further," went on Señor Fernandez. "Señor Ranger said he had the box, but not the treasure. If you will permit me, I will show you that the treasure is still in the box, though, as for the ownership—well, that may be settled later."

"Yes, show us the secret of the box," begged Sam.

They went below into the big cabin, leaving Budge at the wheel, for the course was now an easy one to steer. The box, which had been the cause of so much trouble, was brought out, and placed on the table. Jack gazed curiously at it. It was the first good look he had ever had at it. The chest was substantially made, but the front part of it was marred and somewhat broken, as if in opening the lid the secret spring had been forced. That was what had happened, Señor Fernandez explained.

"Well, it certainly doesn't seem to contain much," said Jack, dubiously, looking into it when the lid was raised.

"Wait," advised the Spaniard, with a smile. "I refused to reveal the secret of the box to those scoundrels, but I will show you. They thought I had taken out the treasure and hid it, and that is why they threatened me. But the treasure is still in the box."

"Well, you'll have to show us," remarked Sam.

"Immediately, Señor," was the reply of the Spaniard. "May I borrow a knife?"

Jack handed him one. The Spaniard opened the smallest blade, and then, carefully examining the box, he inserted the sharp steel into what seemed to be the centre of a bit of carving. Nothing happened, but the foreigner was not disappointed. He repeated this on all four sides of the box. Then, turning it on one side, he inserted the knife in some opening in the bottom, an opening so small that it was barely discernible.

Turning the box once more in an upright position, Señor Fernandez remarked:

"You are about to behold the treasure."

Bending forward, he pressed on two small screw heads that were in the pieces of brass that bound the corners of the box. Immediately there sounded a click, and before the astonished eyes of our friends the four thick sides of the box

fell outward from the top, being hinged on the bottom.

And there, in the glare of the cabin lamp, was revealed a store of flashing jewels and shimmering plates of gold, which caught the rays of light and multiplied them a thousand fold. Out upon the table they tumbled, gold, silver and precious stones, in four piles. The box had given up its secret treasure at the command of one who knew how to open it.

For a moment no one spoke. It had happened so suddenly that it almost took away their breaths. Then the Spaniard, with a motion of his hand toward the box, said:

"I told you it was not empty."

"There's a million dollars there!" gasped Bony, excitedly, cracking his knuckles in double relays. "A million dollars!"

"Not quite," said Señor Fernandez, quietly. "All told, the jewels and gold are worth perhaps sixty thousand dollars."

"Well, we might as well settle right now to whom they belong," said Jack, determinedly. "If they're mine I want 'em, and if they're yours I want you to have them. I overheard what you said in the cave, and I'm quite puzzled over it. I'd like to understand. Who got this box from Judge Bennett's safe, anyhow?"

"I think I can explain it all," said the Spaniard.

"This box is known as the Fernandez treasure, and has been in the family for centuries. Señor Montez was a distant relative, and, with my sister and myself, constituted the sole heirs to the box. Because of some legal entanglements my sister and I could not get our share while Señor Montez was alive, but we hoped he would leave the box to us when he died.

"But this did happen. Poor Señor Montez expired, thinking that we had died in the earthquake, though that was a mistake," and he smiled at Jack. "We were at Martinique—my sister and I—but left before the disaster. That is how Señor Montez made the error. He thought himself the only living heir to the treasure, and believed he could do as he liked with it. But I can prove our claim."

"And I'll give you all the aid I can," said Jack. "I only want what is rightfully mine."

"Montez evidently did not know the secret of the box," went on the Spaniard. "He thought all the treasure in it was contained in the main part. Sometimes gold and jewels were kept there, but merely as a blind. The greater part was held in the four sides of the box, which are hollow, the sides being held in place by springs, operated, as you have seen, by the pressure of a knife placed in secret openings. My sister and I came from Porto Rico and I started west to obtain the box from

Montez, but arrived too late. He had died, and, thinking my sister and I had perished and that the box was his sole property, he gave it to a Señor Ranger—your father,” and the Spaniard looked at Jack. “Señor Ranger shipped the chest east,” he resumed, “but he did not know what treasure it contained. Then I returned east, still on the trail of my inheritance.

“I arrived in Denton, and suspected that the box might be in the express office, but I could not confirm this for several days, as no one called for it, and I dared not enter and look around when the agent was there. I felt that the box was rightfully mine, and I made up my mind to take it wherever I found it.

“However, you, Señor, with your chum, did finally call at the express office to claim the box. I had a glimpse of it, and was positive it was mine. I asked questions about matter arriving from the coast, merely so the agent would not be suspicious of me. At first, when I saw you, Señor Ranger, and your friend, carrying the box away, I took you for messengers, going to the office of Judge Bennett. Later I learned my mistake.

“Then I decided to proceed legally, if I could, and, learning that the place where you had left the box was the office of a lawyer, I determined to appeal to him. If he would not give me the treasure that belonged to me, though, I had made up

my mind to take it by force. I called at the office that night, rather late, as my sister and I were getting ready to leave town. We had gone under the name Manacca, which is part of our real name, as we did not want to arouse suspicion. As it was, a dentist in the judge's building saw me, and I was afraid he might think something was wrong, so I pretended I wanted a doctor.

"I entered the office very quietly, and, as I went in, this Caleb Herkimer was much startled. The big safe was unlocked, and he had my treasure box before him on the floor, and was trying to open it. I commanded him to stop, and he acted very much frightened until I told him my errand. Later I learned that he was in the act of looting the safe when I went in, and that he had also made up his mind to take my treasure box, together with the judge's money and papers. He had not locked the door, for he had no idea any one would come in the place after dark, and, if they did, I presume he would have said he was merely engaged on matters connected with the judge's affairs. But he did not reckon on me.

"After I had explained my title to the treasure chest, the lawyer's clerk agreed that I had a right to it. That is, he seemed to do so, but I know, now, that he was deceiving me. He drew up a paper, at my request, and, later, my sister came in and signed it, that same night."

"It was then she lost her hatpin," explained Jack, for the benefit of his chums.

"Yes," answered Señor Fernandez, "a hatpin made from some of the jewels long in the possession of our family. There are some like it here, and they were made by an ancient Indian tribe. My sister was heart-broken over the loss of her pin."

"I gave it back to her," said Jack, and he explained part of the circumstances.

"Well," resumed the Spaniard, "after the paper was signed I directed the clerk to show it to Judge Bennett and to you, explaining why I took my box. Then Señor Herkimer made a strange proposition. He said it would be more legal if he took charge of the box, and that he would act as my agent. Knowing nothing of law in your country, I consented. We left the office, my sister and I, and Señor Herkimer agreed to follow us to New York with the box. We left for New York, and so did he, but on his arrival there, instead of acting in my interests, he immediately fled, taking a vessel for Porto Rico, and carrying my box with him. That was where he made one mistake, for he did not know, or else he overlooked the fact that my home was on that island.

"I determined to follow, and, hunting about for a vessel, I met with Lavine and the others, who had hired the *Dolphin* for some purpose of their

own. I explained some of my circumstances to them, and promised to pay them well if they would help me to recover the treasure box. They agreed, and we sailed. I expected my sister to join me on the *Dolphin*, but she was delayed, and there was an error in dates, so she was left behind. I hoped she would be able to make her way to Porto Rico, and, it seems, she was," and he looked gratefully at Jack. "But I never dreamed she would be robbed."

"Well, we made good time, but had a breakdown, and put into some Southern port. I forget the name."

"Charleston," said Jack.

"Yes, that was it. Well, when we got under way again, it was in a vessel of a different name, for the *Dolphin* had been rechristened the *Annabell*. Lavine said he suspected that we were being followed by persons who would try to get the treasure away from us, so I was not suspicious, and was glad of the change.

"After we left Charleston we made good time, until we arrived at Porto Rico. There, to my surprise, I learned that my sister had not arrived, for I had hoped she would take a regular steamer, and be there before me. I did not know that she and her nurse had no money, or that they came with you.

"I remained at my home in Ponce but a few

hours and at once began the search for Caleb Herkimer. I did not find him, but it seems that he knew I was after him. He then unexpectedly met and formed an alliance with Lavine and those who had brought me to Porto Rico, and they plotted to rob me of the treasure. For by this time Herkimer had succeeded in opening the top part of the box, though he had to break it to do so. The top was empty, save for some papers of no value, but he concluded that these were the directions for finding the treasure, which he supposed was buried somewhere. He never thought to smash the box and look within the sides. He planned for the others to take the box to Cavern Island, and me with it, and there they hoped they could, in that lonely place, make me tell the secret.

“Herkimer went from Porto Rico to Cavern Island in a small boat he had engaged, before Lavine and the others took me there. I learned this later. They deceived me by telling me I would surely recover my treasure in the cave, and I foolishly believed them. But I took the precaution, before I left, of writing an account of the whole affair, explaining everything to my sister. I left this letter for her in our house, for I knew that, sooner or later, she would return to Porto Rico, though then I could not understand her delay, as I thought she had money enough to sail on a regular steamer. Marinello Booghoobally, or

Hemp Smith, remained in Porto Rico, as a sort of spy, I think, after we started for Cavern Island. Up to then he had not met Herkimer."

"Then he did tell the truth on that one point," commented Jack, and Nat nodded.

"On my arrival at the island," resumed the Spaniard, "I was at once made a captive, as you have seen, and the apparently empty box was shown to me. They thought I had the treasure from it. Then began a series of terrible days. I was starved and beaten by turns to make me tell the secret of the treasure, but I refused. Herkimer, opening the chest, and seeing nothing but the empty space, when he hoped to find it full of gold, was wild with rage, as were those other scoundrels he had engaged to help him. They even sent the yacht back to Porto Rico, to get Hemp Smith, who arrived later. Lavine hoped that by some of Smith's tricks he might discover the secret, but he could do no more than they, and I kept silent, hoping against hope."

"They must have been bringing Hemp the time we sighted the *Dolphin* headed for the island," commented Sam.

"That's it," agreed Jack.

"I had a hope that, somehow, my sister might send aid to me," went on Señor Fernandez, "when several days passed, and I did not return home."

"She was instrumental in our coming," said

Jack, "but it was not exactly in the way you expected. I came here to get the box I thought was rightfully mine, and I was afraid you had taken it unlawfully. Though I was sure, at first, that Caleb Herkimer had taken it."

"So he had," interrupted the Spaniard.

"And when he thought it was empty, he had the nerve to try to sell it back to you, Jack," remarked Nat. "Slithering soup tureens! But he is the limit!"

"He thought it would be an easy way to make a thousand dollars," suggested Sam.

"I suspected something of that sort, when I saw what sort of a man his tool, Dupoy, was," explained Jack. "He was as bad as Hemp Smith. But, Señor Fernandez, how did your sister come to conclude that *I* was the owner of the box?"

"Because of the untruths that the scoundrel Herkimer told her," was the reply. "He called on her, at our home in Ponce, as I have gathered from what he confessed to me in the cave, and he told her that I had no good title to the chest, that it was rightfully Mr. Ranger's, and that I was deserted on the island with the chest. He pretended that he and the others would have no more to do with me. This alarmed my sister, and must have caused her to write to you as she did. Perhaps Herkimer imagined that my sister would come to the cave, and that they could get her into

their power, and so use her to influence me to tell the secret. They imagined I knew where the treasure was buried.

"There is little more to tell," went on Señor Fernandez. Herkimer and the other scoundrels, working together, and keeping me a captive in the cave, tried their best to make me reveal the secret, but I would not. At last they resolved to resort to extreme measures. They were going to flog me. You, looking in the cave, saw what happened. I managed to loosen my bonds, and ran out. I hoped to be able to get to their yacht, and bribe the machinists on board to take me away. I did not know of your presence on the island. But it all ended well, and—well, the treasure is here. It is for the lawyers to say to whom it belongs."

"I don't know what sort of a claim I have," remarked Jack, "but my father seemed to think it was a good one. However, as you say, we will let the lawyers decide. And now——"

"'FiwasyouI'deat," interrupted a voice at this juncture, and Budge, who had been relieved at the wheel, poked his head in the cabin. "Skeleton says supper's ready long ago," and, resuming the chewing of the gum, which he had interrupted to impart the last information, the odd lad disappeared.

"Well, I suppose we might as well eat," observed Jack.

There was a merry party at supper on the yacht that night, and the story of the chase after the treasure box was told over again in detail. Good time was made back to Porto Rico, the yacht tying up at Ponce. After Lavine and the other plotters had been landed in jail, Señor Fernandez took Jack and his chums to the pleasant country house. It is needless to say that Miss Manacca was much surprised at the arrival of her brother with the treasure box.

The following day lawyers were consulted, and legal documents examined. It developed that Señor Montez was entitled to a third share of the treasure, and that his transfer of this part to Jack's father was perfectly legal. The other two-thirds, however,, belonged to the brother and sister, who were rejoiced to get it after so many hardships.

The total value of the treasure proved to be a little over sixty-five thousand dollars, as some of the jewels were worth more than their intrinsic value because of the rare settings. A division of the wealth was made, Jack taking charge of the part that belonged to his father.

After a few days in jail, Lavine and the others were released, as it was decided that it would be hard to prove anything against them. And as all of Judge Bennett's valuable papers were recovered, and part of his five thousand dollars, he

cabled that he did not want his clerk prosecuted. Then Herkimer was warned never to show himself in Denton again, and he was glad enough to promise. As for Hemp Smith, Lavine and Jerry Chowden, they disappeared as soon as they were released.

"Well, this was an outing long to be remembered," said Sam one evening, as they sat on the verandah of the Fernandez home. "It was the best ever."

"Oh, maybe we'll have some more exciting times," spoke Bony. "You forget that Washington Hall still exists, and that Professors Gerlach and Socrat are there."

Jack and his chums remained on the island of Porto Rico two weeks longer, and they enjoyed every moment of their stay, for Miss Fernandez and her brother were charming hosts.

One pleasant day they set sail for home in the *Sea Bird*. Jack distributed some of his treasure among his chums, who had stood by him so loyally, and Budge considered himself the luckiest chap in the world. He had enough to set him up in business, which he had long looked forward to. The reward offered by Judge Bennett was divided among Captain Reeger and the crew of the *Sea Bird*.

The treasure box itself Jack kept as a souvenir, the Fernandez brother and sister insisting on

this, and he hid his most cherished possessions in it, for the secret lock on the cover was repaired, and many a person Jack puzzled with it. Of the jewels, Jack gave his three aunts each beautiful pins.

"Let's sing, fellows," proposed Sam, as they were all seated on the deck one moonlight night, speeding toward New York.

"We ought to have Miss Fernandez here with her guitar," suggested Nat.

"Bony will accompany us by cracking his knuckles," said Nat.

"Get out! I will not."

"Fred Kaler ought to be here with his mouth organ," said Jack, "but we can sing, anyhow." And they started an old school chorus, "Down the Line for a Touchdown!" which they rendered with good effect.

On sped the yacht, over the sea which was turned to silver by the moon, and while they are thus on deck, singing happy songs, and thinking of the strenuous times through which they passed in order to get possession of Jack Ranger's treasure box, we will take our leave.

THE END

THE JACK RANGER SERIES

BY CLARENCE YOUNG

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Jacket in Colors

Price per volume, \$1.00, postpaid



Lively stories of outdoor sports and adventure every boy will want to read.

1. JACK RANGER'S SCHOOL DAYS

or The Rivals of Washington Hall

You will love Jack Ranger—you simply can't help it. He is bright and cheery, and earnest in all he does.

2. JACK RANGER'S WESTERN TRIP

or From Boarding School to Ranch and Range

This volume takes the hero to the great West. Jack is anxious to clear up the mystery surrounding his father's disappearance.

3. JACK RANGER'S SCHOOL VICTORIES

or Track, Gridiron and Diamond

Jack gets back to Washington Hall and goes in for all sorts of school games. There are numerous contests on the athletic field.

4. JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE

or The Wreck of the Polly Ann

How Jack was carried off to sea against his will makes a "yarn" no boy will want to miss.

5. JACK RANGER'S GUN CLUB

or From Schoolroom to Camp and Trail

Jack organizes a gun club and with his chums goes in quest of big game. They have many adventures in the mountains.

6. JACK RANGER'S TREASURE BOX

or The Outing of the Schoolboy Yachtsmen

Jack receives a box from his father and it is stolen. How he regains it makes an absorbing tale.

Send For Our Free Illustrated Catalogue

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, Publishers

New York

THE GREAT MARVEL SERIES

By ROY ROCKWOOD

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Jacket in Colors

Price per volume, \$1.00, postpaid



Stories of adventures in strange places, with peculiar people and queer animals.

1. THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE

or The Wonderful Cruise of the Electric Monarch

The tale of a trip to the frozen North with a degree of reality that is most convincing.

2. UNDER THE OCEAN TO THE SOUTH POLE

or The Strange Cruise of the Submarine Wonder

A marvelous trip from Maine to the South Pole, telling of adventures with the sea-monsters and savages.

3. FIVE THOUSAND MILES UNDERGROUND

or The Mystery of the Center of the Earth

A cruise to the center of the earth through an immense hole found at an island in the ocean.

4. THROUGH SPACE TO MARS

or The Most Wonderful Trip on Record

This book tells how the journey was made in a strange craft and what happened on Mars.

5. LOST ON THE MOON

or In Quest of the Field of Diamonds

Strange adventures on the planet which is found to be a land of desolation and silence.

6. ON A TORN-AWAY WORLD

or Captives of the Great Earthquake

After a tremendous convulsion of nature the adventurers find themselves captives on a vast "island in the air."

7. THE CITY BEYOND THE CLOUDS

or Captured by the Red Dwarfs

The City Beyond the Clouds is a weird place, full of surprises, and the impish Red Dwarfs caused no end of trouble. There is a fierce battle in the woods and in the midst of this a volcanic eruption sends the Americans sailing away in a feverish endeavor to save their lives.

Send For Our Free Illustrated Catalogue

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, Publishers

New York

THE JEWEL SERIES

BY AMES THOMPSON

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Jacket in colors

Price per volume, 65 cents



A series of stories brimming with hardy adventure, vivid and accurate in detail, and with a good foundation of probability. They take the reader realistically to the scene of action. Besides being lively and full of real situations, they are written in a straightforward way very attractive to boy readers.

1. THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE VALLEY OF DIAMONDS

Malcolm Edwards and his son Ralph are adventurers with ample means for following up their interest in jewel clues. In this book they form a party of five, including Jimmy Stone and Bret Hartson, boys of Ralph's age, and a shrewd level-headed sailor named Stanley Greene. They find a valley of diamonds in the heart of Africa.

2. THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE RIVER OF EMERALDS

The five adventurers, staying at a hotel in San Francisco, find that Pedro the elevator man has an interesting story of a hidden "river of emeralds" in Peru, to tell. With him as guide, they set out to find it, escape various traps set for them by jealous Peruvians, and are much amused by Pedro all through the experience.

3. THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE LAGOON OF PEARLS

This time the group starts out on a cruise simply for pleasure, but their adventuresome spirits lead them into the thick of things on a South Sea cannibal island.

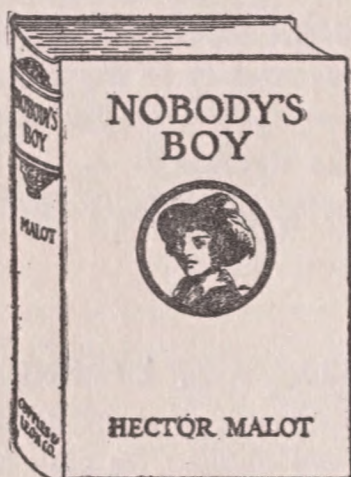
Send For Our Free Illustrated Catalogue

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, PUBLISHERS **New York**

Everybody will love the story of

NOBODY'S BOY

By HECTOR MALOT



The dearest character in all the literature of child life is little Remi in Hector Malot's famous masterpiece *Sans Famille* ("Nobody's Boy").

All love, pathos, loyalty, and noble boy character are exemplified in this homeless little lad, who has made the world better for his being in it. The boy or girl who knows Remi has an ideal never to be forgotten. But it is a story for grown-ups, too.

"Nobody's Boy" is one of the supreme heart-interest stories of all time, which will *make you happier and better.*

4 Colored Illustrations. \$1.50 net.

At All Booksellers

CUPPLES & LEON CO.

Publishers

New York

THE KING OF THE MOUNTAINS

(Le Roi des Montagnes)

By EDMOND ABOUT

Translated by Florence Crewe-Jones

Illustrated by George Avison

12mo. Illustrated. Beautiful cloth binding, stamped in gold. Jacket in colors.
Price \$1.50 Net



Edmond About's classic masterpiece of whimsical humor, romantic action and wild surroundings, appeals to all classes and ages of readers. The lawless, happy-go-lucky bands of the Grecian mountains, bargaining with prisoners and gov-

ernment officials in a kind of uncivilized traffic, affords the uncertainty in adventure which makes delightful reading for boy or man.

Hadji Stavros is the never-to-be-forgotten representative of the right to get without limits. To him the only injustice or error in life was in being weak, in which any unselfishness was weakness. And yet, he allowed his love for his daughter to overthrow his system of life. To be entertained by "The King of the Mountains" as a dramatic story is not enough, it is a profound study of character and life.

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, Publishers

New York

THE COLLEGE SPORTS SERIES

BY LESTER CHADWICK

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Jacket in Colors

Price per volume, \$1.00, postpaid



Mr. Chadwick has played on the diamonds and on the gridiron himself.

1. THE RIVAL PITCHERS

A Story of College Baseball

Tom Parsons, a "hayseed," makes good on the scrub team of Randall College.

2. A QUARTERBACK'S PLUCK

A Story of College Football

A football story, told in Mr. Chadwick's best style, that is bound to grip the reader from the start.

3. BATTING TO WIN

A Story of College Baseball

Tom Parsons and his friends Phil and Sid are the leading players on Randall College team. There is a great game.

4. THE WINNING TOUCHDOWN

A Story of College Football

After having to reorganize their team at the last moment, Randall makes a touchdown that won a big game.

5. FOR THE HONOR OF RANDALL

A Story of College Athletics

The winning of the hurdle race and long-distance run is extremely exciting.

6. THE EIGHT-OARED VICTORS

A Story of College Water Sports

Tom, Phil and Sid prove as good at aquatic sports as they are on track, gridiron and diamond.

Send For Our Free Illustrated Catalogue

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, Publishers

New York

THE BOY RANCHERS SERIES

By WILLARD F. BAKER

[12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Jacket in full colors

Price per volume, 65 cents, postpaid

Stories of the great west, with cattle ranches as a setting, related in such a style as to captivate the hearts of all boys.

1. THE BOY RANCHERS

or Solving the Mystery at Diamond X

Two eastern boys visit their cousin. They become involved in an exciting mystery.

2. THE BOY RANCHERS IN CAMP

or The Water Fight at Diamond X

Returning for a visit, the two eastern lads learn, with delight, that they are to become boy ranchers.

3. THE BOY RANCHERS ON THE TRAIL

or The Diamond X After Cattle Rustlers

Our boy heroes take the trail after Del Pinzo and his outlaws.

4. THE BOY RANCHERS AMONG THE INDIANS

or Trailing the Yaquis

[Rosemary and Floyd are captured by the Yaqui Indians.

5. THE BOY RANCHERS AT SPUR CREEK

or Fighting the Sheep Herders

Dangerous struggle against desperadoes for land rights.

6. THE BOY RANCHERS IN THE DESERT

or Diamond X and the Lost Mine

One night a strange old miner almost dead from hunger and hardship arrived at the bunk house. The boys cared for him and he told them of the lost desert mine.

7. THE BOY RANCHERS ON ROARING RIVER

or Diamond X and the Chinese Smugglers

The boy ranchers help capture Delton's gang who were engaged in smuggling Chinese across the border.

8. THE BOY RANCHERS IN DEATH VALLEY

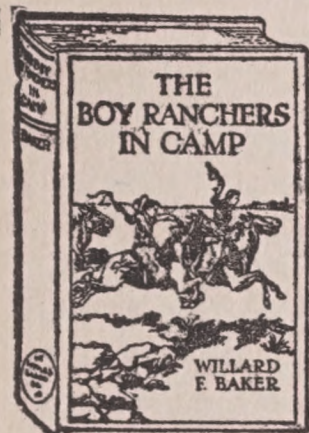
or Diamond X and the Poison Mystery

The boy ranchers track mysterious Death into his cave.

Send For Our Free Illustrated Catalogue

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, Publishers

New York



SEA STORIES FOR BOYS

By JOHN GABRIEL ROWE

Large 12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Colored jacket

Price per volume, \$1.00 Net



Every boy who knows the lure of exploring and who loves to rig up huts and caves and tree-houses to fortify himself against imaginary enemies will enjoy these books, for they give a vivid chronicle of the doings and inventions of a group of boys who are shipwrecked and have to make themselves snug and safe in tropical islands where the dangers are too real for play.

1. CRUSOE ISLAND

Dick, Alf and Fred find themselves stranded on an unknown island with the old seaman Josh, their ship destroyed by fire, their friends lost.

2. THE ISLAND TREASURE

With much ingenuity these boys fit themselves into the wild life of the island they are cast upon in storm.

3. THE MYSTERY OF THE DERELICT

Their ship and companions perished in tempest at sea, the boys are adrift in a small open boat when they spy a ship. Such a strange vessel!—no hand guiding it, no soul on board,—a derelict.

4. THE LIGHTSHIP PIRATES

Modern Pirates, with the ferocity of beasts, attack a lightship crew;—recounting the adventures that befall the survivors of that crew,—and—“RETRIBUTION.”

5. THE SECRET OF THE GOLDEN IDOL

Telling of a mutiny, and how two youngsters were unwillingly involved in one of the weirdest of treasure hunts,—and—“THE GOLDEN FETISH.”

Send For Our Free Illustrated Catalogue

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, Publishers

New York

The Boy Hunters Series

By Captain Ralph Bonehill

12mo. Illustrated. Price per volume, \$1.00, postpaid.



FOUR BOY HUNTERS

Or, The Outing of the Gun Club

A FINE, breezy story of the woods and waters, of adventures in search of game, and of great times around the campfire, told in Captain Bonehill's best style. In the book are given full directions for camping out.

GUNS AND SNOWSHOES

Or, The Winter Outing of the Young Hunters

IN this volume the young hunters leave home for a winter outing on the shores of a small lake. They hunt and trap to their heart's content, and have adventures in plenty, all calculated to make boys "sit up and take notice." A good healthy book; one with the odor of the pine forests and the glare of the welcome campfire in every chapter.

YOUNG HUNTERS OF THE LAKE

Or, Out with Rod and Gun

Another tale of woods and waters, with some strong hunting scenes and a good deal of mystery. The three volumes make a splendid outdoor series.

OUT WITH GUN AND CAMERA

Or, The Boy Hunters in the Mountains

TAKES up the new fad of photographing wild animals as well as shooting them. An escaped circus chimpanzee and an escaped lion add to the interest of the narrative.

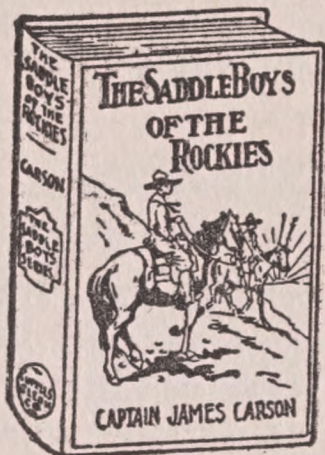
GUPPLES & LEON CO., Publishers,

NEW YORK

THE BOYS' OUTING LIBRARY

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Jacket in full color.

Price, per volume, 65 cents, postpaid.



THE SADDLE BOYS SERIES

By CAPT. JAMES CARSON

The Saddle Boys of the Rockies
The Saddle Boys in the Grand Canyon
The Saddle Boys on the Plains
The Saddle Boys at Circle Ranch
The Saddle Boys on Mexican Trails

THE DAVE DASHAWAY SERIES

By ROY ROCKWOOD

Dave Dashaway the Young Aviator
Dave Dashaway and His Hydroplane
Dave Dashaway and His Giant Airship
Dave Dashaway Around the World
Dave Dashaway: Air Champion

THE SPEEDWELL BOYS SERIES

By ROY ROCKWOOD

The Speedwell Boys on Motorcycles
The Speedwell Boys and Their Racing Auto
The Speedwell Boys and Their Power Launch
The Speedwell Boys in a Submarine
The Speedwell Boys and Their Ice Racer

THE TOM FAIRFIELD SERIES

By ALLEN CHAPMAN

Tom Fairfield's School Days	Tom Fairfield in Camp
Tom Fairfield at Sea	Tom Fairfield's Pluck and Luck
Tom Fairfield's Hunting Trip	

THE FRED FENTON ATHLETIC SERIES

By ALLEN CHAPMAN

Fred Fenton the Pitcher	Fred Fenton on the Crew
Fred Fenton in the Line	Fred Fenton on the Track
Fred Fenton: Marathon Runner	

Send For Our Free Illustrated Catalogue.

CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY, Publishers

New York

THE MOTOR BOYS SERIES

BY CLARENCE YOUNG

12mo. Illustrated. Price per volume, \$1.00, postpaid



THE MOTOR BOYS

or Chums Through Thick and Thin

THE MOTOR BOYS OVERLAND

or A Long Trip for Fun and Fortune

THE MOTOR BOYS IN MEXICO

or The Secret of the Buried City

THE MOTOR BOYS ACROSS THE PLAINS

or The Hermit of Lost Lake

THE MOTOR BOYS AFLOAT

or The Cruise of the Dartaway

THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE ATLANTIC

or The Mystery of the Lighthouse

THE MOTOR BOYS IN STRANGE WATERS

or Lost in a Floating Forest

THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE PACIFIC

or The Young Derelict Hunters

THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE CLOUDS

or A Trip for Fame and Fortune

THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE ROCKIES

or A Mystery of the Air

THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN

or A Marvelous Rescue in Mid-Air

THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE WING

or Seeking the Airship Treasure

THE MOTOR BOYS AFTER A FORTUNE

or The Hut on Snake Island

THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

or Sixty Nuggets of Gold

THE MOTOR BOYS UNDER THE SEA

or From Airship to Submarine

THE MOTOR BOYS ON ROAD AND RIVER

or Racing to Save a Life

THE MOTOR BOYS AT BOXWOOD HALL

or Ned, Bob and Jerry as Freshmen

THE MOTOR BOYS ON A RANCH

or Ned, Bob and Jerry Among the Cowboys

THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE ARMY

or Ned, Bob and Jerry as Volunteers

THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE FIRING LINE

or Ned, Bob and Jerry Fighting for Uncle Sam

THE MOTOR BOYS BOUND FOR HOME

or Ned, Bob and Jerry on the Wrecked Troopship

THE MOTOR BOYS ON THUNDER MOUNTAIN

or The Treasure Box of Blue Rock

THE WEBSTER SERIES

By FRANK V. WEBSTER



Mr. WEBSTER'S style is very much like that of the boys' favorite author, the late lamented Horatio Alger, Jr., but his tales are thoroughly up-to-date.

Cloth. 12mo. Over 200 pages each. Illustrated. Stamped in various colors.

Price per volume, 65 cents, postpaid.

Only A Farm Boy
or Dan Hardy's Rise in Life

The Boy From The Ranch
or Roy Bradner's City Experiences

The Young Treasure Hunter
or Fred Stanley's Trip to Alaska

The Boy Pilot of the Lakes
or Nat Morton's Perils

Tom The Telephone Boy
or The Mystery of a Message

Bob The Castaway
or The Wreck of the Eagle

The Newsboy Partners
or Who Was Dick Box?

Two Boy Gold Miners
or Lost in the Mountains

The Young Firemen of Lakeville
or Herbert Dare's Pluck

The Boys of Bellwood School
or Frank Jordan's Triumph

Jack the Runaway
or On the Road with a Circus

Bob Chester's Grit
or From Ranch to Riches

Airship Andy
or The Luck of a Brave Boy

High School Rivals
or Fred Markham's Struggles

Darry The Life Saver
or The Heroes of the Coast

Dick The Bank Boy
or A Missing Fortune

Ben Hardy's Flying Machine
or Making a Record for Himself

Harry Watson's High School Days
or The Rivals of Rivertown

Comrades of the Saddle
or The Young Rough Riders of the Plains

Tom Taylor at West Point
or The Old Army Officer's Secret

The Boy Scouts of Lennox
or Hiking Over Big Bear Mountain

The Boys of the Wireless
or a Stirring Rescue from the Deep

Cowboy Dave
or The Round-up at Rolling River

Jack of the Pony Express
or The Young Rider of the Mountain Trail

The Boys of the Battleship
or For the Honor of Uncle Sam

CUPPLES & LEON CO., Publishers

NEW YORK

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00024538886

